THE Hudson REVIEW

JOYCE CAROL OATES:
Notes on Failure

RICHARD HOFFMAN:
They That Mourn—a memoir

JAMES FINN COTTER:
Divining Dante

VERNON YOUNG:
Some Day in Tahiti

ALFRED CORN:
Time to Read Proust

Poems by JAYANTA MAHAPATRA, WILLIAM HATHAWAY, KATE JENNINGS, DANA GIOIA, PHILIP BOOTH, ANDREW HUDGINS, SYDNEY LEA, DEREK MAHON, ELIZABETH KNIES, RUTH FAINLIGHT.

Reviews by HAYDEN CARRUTH, MARVIN MUDRICK, GILBERTO PEREZ, DEAN FLOWER, EMILY GROSHOLZ, JEFFERSON HUNTER, RICHARD PEVEAR, DORE J. LEVY.

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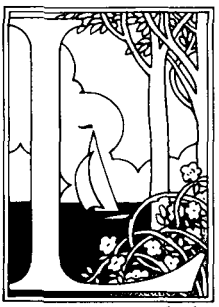

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THE HUDSON REVIEW is published quarterly by The Hudson Review, Inc., 65 East 55th Street, New York, N. Y. 10022. It is a member of The Council of Literary Magazines and of COSMEP, and is indexed in the Social Sciences and Humanities Index. Book reviews are indexed in Book Review Index, and poems in Index of American Periodical Verse.

Subscription $14.00 per year in U. S.; foreign including Canada $15.00. Single copy $4.00. Special rate for bulk orders. U. S. distributor: B. De Boer, Inc., 113 E. Centre Street, Nutley, N. J. 07110. Library subscriptions in England: Periodicals Division, B. H. Blackwell Ltd., P. O. Box 40, Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford. Back issues and reprints of Volumes I—XXXIII available from AMS Press, Inc., 56 East 13th Street, New York, N. Y. 10003. Microfilms of Volumes I—XXXIII available from University Microfilms, Inc., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106. We handle directly all requests for permission to photocopy.

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Opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Editors. The Editors are responsible for the entire contents of the magazine. THE HUDSON REVIEW does not have, and has never had, special "Poetry," "Fiction," "Articles," or "Book Review" editors.

Printed in the United States of America. Second Class postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices. Registered U. S. Patent Office.

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THE
Hudson Review

VOLUME XXXV
NUMBER 2
SUMMER 1982

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To Our Readers

The editorial offices of THE HUDSON REVIEW are moving to a new location. As of September 1, 1982, our address will be: 684 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10021.

A new book by one of the advisory editors of THE HUDSON REVIEW has recently been published. In accordance with our policy, the book will not be reviewed in these pages, but is listed below for the interest of our readers:

HAYDEN CARRUTH: *Working Papers: Selected Essays and Reviews.* Ed. by Judith Weissman. The University of Georgia Press. $19.95.

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Letter to the Editors

Dear Editors,

Readers of Marvin Mudrick's review-essay on Voltaire and his biographers (*The Hudson Review*, Winter 1981–82) might be interested in the following counter-proposal, from the Journals of Edmond and Jules de Goncourt:

> Both of us, speaking of the writer and without regard to his social or political influence, contested his literary value, daring to repeat the Abbé Trublet's opinion that Voltaire was "the perfection of mediocrity." We recognized that he had a certain merit as popularizer, as journalist, but nothing more. He was witty, if you like; but his wit was not of a higher order than the wit of many witty old ladies of his time. His plays? Who dares defend them? His history? Full of lies and the most pompous and stupid conventions of solemn old-fashioned historiography. His science and his hypotheses are plainly ridiculous. . . . The only thing he wrote which justifies keeping his name alive, that famous *Candide*, is after all mere La Fontaine in prose, Rabelais castrato. What are his eighty volumes worth beside a *Neveu de Rameau*, or a *Ceci n'est pas un conte*, those marvels that Diderot wrote? . . .

VERNON YOUNG

Philadelphia

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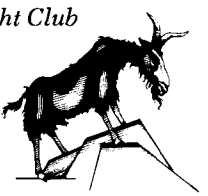

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RICHARD HOFFMAN

They That Mourn

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.
—Matthew 5:4

BOB, MY BROTHER, LAUGHED BEFORE HE DIED. He said, "I don't get it."

"Get what?" I asked.

"Why can't I find the words?" he said. He laughed again and then went under. For three or four hours I watched a pulse in his neck. It was like holding his heart in my hands. I knew it would stop; when it did I went out into the hall and hugged my mother. At first she hugged me back, then she held me at arm's length and looked in my eyes. I didn't nod or anything but she broke into tears and slumped against me and I lowered her till she was sitting on the floor in the hospital corridor, rocking and crying. My father leaped up—"No No No No No"—and ran into the room. My brother Joe leaned against the wall, staring at the floor. I shut off my grief at once; became my parents' parent. I drove the car home, eyes on the traffic, Joe beside me, pale, astonished. Mom and Dad, their faces red, held each other in the back seat, moaning and crying out from time to time, "Bobby!"

My grandmother, Etta, laughed before she died, laughed and tried to sing: *lalalalalalalalala, haha. Ha.* Everybody said it was the medication. They were ashamed; wouldn't allow her to be that happy with her death. She was dying of cancer. My family treated her like an idiot. "I'm dying," she'd say, and in chorus around the bed they'd answer:

"Cut it out, Etta, that's nonsense."

"Don't be ridiculous, Mother."

"You'll be home by Christmas."

"Nonsense."

Do not speak it. It will go away. The superstition of the

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scared. A ritual of inability—not only to accompany the dying any farther, but even to admit the reason why: we are afraid.

"Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid," I whispered in Bob's ear as he was dying. I kept my vigil at the pulse in his neck. I don't know if he heard me.

None of us know when Bob discovered he was dying, that what was happening to him, his gathering weakness, his frequent falls, his troublesome coordination, was called Muscular Dystrophy. We, my family, know that he knew the truth by the time he entered high school. I have a dreadful suspicion how he found out. I remember an afternoon when I was about ten (Bob was a year younger than I); we were watching television and a commercial came on. It was Jerry Lewis, the comedian; he had a young boy with him. The boy was in a wheelchair; his head rolled around in a strange way while he smiled and laughed at Jerry's tickles. My mother hurried in from the kitchen, drying her hands, and turned off the television.

"Help your brother up," she said to me, "and both of you go out in the yard and play."

"Oh come on, Mom."

"We were right in the middle of the program!" I whined.

She turned on me, enraged, "I said go out in the yard and I mean it!" Neither Bob nor I knew then why she was crying. Those commercials went on for years.

I don't believe my brother Michael ever knew that he was dying. I remember him crying, telling us how badly it hurt. The ambulance came; my father insisted on riding along. I remember him coming home that night and telling Bob and Joe and me that everything would be all right. My brother Mike was thirteen when he died: weakened by severe Muscular Dystrophy, his burst appendix was too much for him.

A family is memory. For a long time after loss, our talk is very careful. Each memory, along with what it brings, what connections it makes, brings pain. In fear, we bury much of what we shared. We are called *survivors*; we *live after*.

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We pray that the dead may rest in peace, which is to ask that they completely leave us.

*

Something's wrong with Bobby. What? He's walking on his toes. He's having trouble going up the stairs. "We've just begun to notice things," my father says. He cries a lot; he's not himself. "You say he's six now, is that right?" says the doctor, ruffling Bobby's hair. Bob looks at me; he always hated that. I chime in, "Yeah and he don't rollerskate as good as me."

"You fall down sometimes too!" he cries. My mother looks at me and says, "You learn to keep your mouth shut or you'll get a spanking."

"Don't give me no needles," Bob says, "*please*."

We're going on a trip: Mom, Dad, Joey the baby, Mammy Etta, Bobby and me. We're in a big, round, shiny, black '50 Pontiac, my Dad's first car. Joey's on Mom's lap; Bobby, me and Mammy are in the back. Bobby and I want to sit next to each other so we can fight, that's what Mammy says. She lets us. Lancaster is two hours from Allentown; four hours to look at things and places out the window! We look and fight till Dad says, "Etta, what the hell is going on back there?" We stop for gas; get back in the car with Mammy in between us.

Bobby cried all the way home, a bandage wrapped around his right leg, Mammy's arms around him. I looked out the window, trying to get excited about the hills, the farms, the cows, the other cars, the billboards. Except for Bob, I don't remember anyone, all the way home, making a sound.

They'd done a biopsy, slit the back of Bob's right calf and snipped a bit of muscle from it. Minor surgery: to a child there's nothing more terrifying—the needle itself is terror, then a stranger, a grown-up, cuts you! My father decided to remove the sutures himself, a week or so later. Mom and I held Bobby on the bed; Dad, with his tweezers, kept saying, "Keep still, damn it," while Bob screamed through the whole procedure. It must have been too early for the stitches to come out because he bled; he always had a tender, raised scar on his leg after that.

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While we were still small enough, my father would lie on his back on the floor and hold us above him, his palms on our chests. Whenever he rested on his elbows, Bob and I yelled, "Up in the air!" and he pushed us up again. As we grew, my father had another less dangerous game; he would lie with his arms outstretched and Bob and I would try to keep his arms pinned down.

We had a game we played in the bathtub, sitting facing each other, thigh-deep in the tepid water, the little purple buds of our penises just breaking the surface. Peepees we called them. We could only play when Mom was out of the room for a few moments because the game consisted of both peeing at the same time and laughing hysterically. That was all, but it was enough to make us laugh again and again the whole time we were in the tub. Mom would sit down on the toilet lid, supervising very seriously, coaching us in the use of the washcloth, telling us not to splash so much or to use more soap, and all the time we had this great secret between us that set us laughing every time our eyes met.

Later our games became competitive. The more I came to be better than him, the further apart we grew. We used to play a game with clothesline, tying each other to an iron post in the backyard, to see who was better at knots. I always got out of his knots and always had to loosen the ones I tied because he cried. I remember that rusty post for other reasons. Each of us, when alone in the yard, passed time by ringing music up and down it with a baseball bat. When I was being punished, kept in my room, I'd hear him making music in the yard, sometimes chanting while he banged out random notes in a steady rhythm. It was also a signal: I was more often with other playmates in the neighborhood and *Bong Bing Bong*, repeated and repeated meant *Come home—Mom wants you*, or *I want you*. But it wasn't long before I decided that I couldn't just drop everything and run because my little brother had a mind to signal me, so sometimes I came and sometimes I ignored it. As his legs became weaker, Bob would fall and not be able to get back on his feet. I clearly remember, at least once, his crawling to the post and using it, hand over hand, to stand up.

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I have early memories of parties that my parents had in our house on Ninth Street. I'd be playing on the floor, my parents and their friends around the table playing cards. Smell of tobacco and beer, laughter. My little brother in the bassinet in the next room where my mother went frequently. I was excited when people arrived; the pile of coats grew bigger and bigger and my mother kept picking me up and smiling people talked to me and played with me. They leaned over the bassinet and loudly made my father proud, my mother happy.

I don't know exactly when the parties stopped, when their friends stopped coming. The question is why: maybe because my parents had a "crippled" child, which made it hard for their friends to talk about their healthy kids. Or because my parents were so despondent, full of pain, turned inward, worried, that they turned their friends away. I was in second or third grade then. It had something to do with Bobby.

My mother stayed home; my father went out. It seems incredible to me, the energy he had. At times he worked two jobs; one he still remembers with pride was laying track for a diesel roundhouse at Bethlehem Steel. For a time he also unloaded sacks of spices at a warehouse in the evenings. When he wasn't working evenings he was always doing something—coaching baseball in the summer, refereeing basketball in winter—I went along, a batboy in the summer, and in winter a lonely spectator at basketball games between teams I didn't know. Mostly I watched my father running up and down the court, blowing his whistle, pointing his finger and shouting. Sometimes people booed and I sat behind the scorer flushed with rage. He knew by then, the former promising left-handed pitcher from the Boys' Club. It hurt. *My son is crippled, ill: Muscular Dystrophy. Thank god Dick and Joe are both all right, both healthy, I think.*

My mother stayed home. And wanted a girl this time, a Catherine Marie; carrying Michael Steven, who never learned to walk.

*

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Pain is less than terror, simpler, with boundaries. The syringe is held up to the light; the child sees the needle. People are holding him down, trapping his arms, lying across him. Terror leaves a tender scar right in the memory itself; the pain is not remembered, not rekindled anyway. The moment of terror, remembered, remains.

Grief is more complicated; it includes both pain and terror. Pain itself is simple, something we all share. It's said that we all share grief, but that's not true. On the simpler level of pain, though our thresholds vary, we can be pretty sure what a person howling from scalding his hand feels if we've ever scalded our own. But grief is different. I have no idea what the word means. A slant-rhyme with life. A cross to bear. Yours isn't mine and mine's not yours and we can't trade. We can hold each other crying and moaning but the grief cannot be shared. We can call it pain and share it as best we can, but someone's been torn from us, up from the roots, the intricate tangled ways we loved them that we never saw. We use the catchword grief in desperation but it can't be shared. We're each alone.

*

When I was little I went to the beauty salon with my mother and grandmother. I was alone; that is, Bobby was not along. The salon was the front of someone's house; we went into the kitchen where I was given cookies and milk while the women had coffee. After some talking, Mammy told my mother to go first, and Mom got up and followed the other woman to the front room and they closed the door. I was scared. Horrendous noises came from behind the door: sputtering water, various motors, and one that went on a long time sounding like a powersaw. I screamed and cried. The woman came to the door—the woman, not my mother. When she opened the door I was hit by a vile stench. I was sure that this woman was a devil who was doing something awful, painful, perhaps sexual to my mother. I threw my glass at her and screamed; when my grandmother reached to pick me up I kicked her. She shook me and said, "Your Mommy can't come out now. Stop it! Bad boy. Do you want a spanking?" I

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shut up but I was sure that my mother was hurt or she would have come to me. The smell was hanging in the air so thick I puked. After a while my mother came to me and picked me up and took me outside, where we tore up bread together to throw to the birds. She had had a "permanent."

My mother's hair is lacquered blacker than it was when she was young. Once she was embarrassed when I came home from college a couple of days early and she hadn't gotten to the salon and I saw her roots. She said her roots were showing. Shame, that goes to the roots: my mother bore two congenitally ill, doomed sons. For her, Muscular Dystrophy is a mythic curse: only males are afflicted by it, and only females carry it. A genetic defect. I see my mother washing her face in the morning, looking at herself in the mirror, protecting herself, vigilant against the grey or silk-white roots that prove the past, that say that time is once, once, once. For so many years she knew that her sons would die before her that she had to deny time every day to be there for them, to feed them, wash them, bring them books, papers and pencils, change the channel, bring the pisspot. Michael screamed in the night most every night for five or six years, waking everyone. She slept in a chair downstairs so that she could wake him faster from his nightmares. How can she possibly believe now that one lifetime is all there is? She says we'll be together again. She doesn't go to church; she doesn't need to. She goes to the cemetery, often. She kept them alive inside her once before. "We'll be together again someday," she says.

Mike, then Mammy, then Bob: my mother lost her mother and two sons within a two-year span. She was careful to hide her bitterness; she went deep inside herself and stayed there, at the same time constructing some other person to present us with. This "person" was cheerful, busy, brimming with jokes, gossip, idle chatter. It was as if she herself were absent, but had created some rough replica of herself through which she attempted to go on with her life. I pretended not to see this, played along with it; we all did. She'd tell the same jokes over and over, sometimes within the same conversation. She'd talk about the rising price of peas or lettuce, and if the con-

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versation lagged, she'd mention it again, sometimes in exactly the same words. Her jokes were painfully self-conscious, as if she were trying to demonstrate that she was the same old fun-loving Mom.

She was only going through the motions. "I bought the roast because it was on sale. I'd planned on making pork chops but they were awfully high—last week they were two eighty-nine and now they're up to three forty-nine, it's just ridiculous . . . Oh. Marietta told me a good one last week—this guy goes into a bar and . . . I'm going to put some onions in with the roast, you always liked that . . . I can't believe it what they're getting for pork chops . . ."

Occasionally, however, Mom would hint at what was really going on inside her, but always in such a way that further conversation about it was impossible. Sometimes she talked about Henry, the grocer in our old neighborhood who'd committed suicide. She mentioned this many times and always asked if I remembered him. Of course. He and my mother had a secret that intrigued and mystified me when I was a kid. I often went to the store for my mother after school, before I was allowed to go out and play. Sometimes my mother instructed me to see Henry, no one else; I was to ask for "a box of jiggers." There was something mysterious, perhaps forbidden, going on. When I asked Henry about it he said, "Never you mind," in a way that made my imagination flare and strain to think what they could be. He had to get them down from the highest shelf with a calipers on a long stick; it was a light blue box with a pink rose on it. By the second grade I could read enough to sound out the words and sometimes guess at the meanings. I knew what a napkin was, and sanitary meant something about dirt or toilets, I wasn't sure. I had to know. I got my candy money by collecting empty bottles around the neighborhood, two cents for the small ones and five cents for the big ones, and when I had enough I went to see Henry. I ran two blocks to a lot behind the Presbyterian church and tore open the box. They were white, with cotton squares like the bottom of jewelry boxes, sealed with a tissue like kleenex, and with a little blue stripe down the middle. I thought they must be bandages. Not long after that, I found one in the garbage can, bloody, covered with

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flies. They *were* bandages. I had figured out the secret: *my mother was hurt, wounded, but she was too brave to tell us.*

"It's all my fault. It's all my fault," she wailed back home after Mike was buried. I took her by the chin and tried to make her look at me.

"Bullshit, mother!" I said, a whispered scream. Relatives came over to us.

"What's the matter?" asked my uncle Bert. "Come on now Dolly, come on," he said to her as if he were soothing a horse. She reached for him and sobbed and dried her eyes and turned to me and hugged me. "I'm okay," she said.

There are always "get-togethers" after funerals: booze, potato chips and pretzels. After Bob was buried, everyone, maybe thirty people, in the kitchen, drinking, surrounded Joe and me and Mom and Dad. Liquor and beer flowed freely. Joe was sullen, the only one not drinking; he looked angry, as if he wished everyone would clear out. It was hard for me to look at him; I wasn't allowing myself to feel that way. Again, I was detached, and though I felt some of the things that he showed by his silence, I was thinking of my parents. Maybe this is what they need now, family and friends; this is how it's done. I needed it too, people asking me what I've been doing over the years since they last saw me; people telling me about their jobs, their businesses, their families. Mainly I was watching my parents. The more distant relatives started getting on their coats, along with old friends who hadn't been around in years. Everybody had to say goodbye to each of us. There were promises to stay in touch. A couple of men my father used to work with said goodbye: my father hugged one of them and whimpered. The man looked embarrassed. Mom kept saying, "Thanks for coming. Thanks for coming." Someone made a funny crack, and one of my aunts started laughing. Soon it was permissible to smile or laugh softly if you felt like it. Someone made my mother laugh at something. I watched her laugh and begin to reply. Then her look changed; terrified, she judged herself. She'd buried her son today and she was laughing. I saw unfounded shame come over her, and her head rolled back and she passed out. My

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uncle Bert and I carried her to the sofa. I asked my cousin Ed to try to get everyone to leave and called the doctor. Then my father started moaning and rocking with his arms folded over his belly, saying, "I was cruel to him. I swore at him." I touched Bert on the arm and went to my Dad: he needed some attention; Mom was getting all of it. He had become a child. Grief, the tangled roots, go deep.

*

When I was thirteen, my grandfather died, and we moved into his house on 13th Street, an old row-house with stained glass, dormers, a front porch, a fireplace and, to this day, certain smells that remind me of my grandparents. My father spent several months, evenings and weekends, renovating. I was excited when my father and his friends knocked down the wall between the kitchen and the dining room; it was bold, taken as a gesture, also disturbing and sacrilegious. I remember my Dad with his hair full of plaster dust, and being struck by how much he resembled my grandfather.

The wall came down so that we could build a downstairs room for Mike and Bob. It was a simple project: we sectioned off half the dining room with a frame of two-by-fours to which we attached an inexpensive paneling; louvred folding doors completed the room which was just large enough for two cots and the commode. We also built a ramp to fit tightly over the back steps for my brothers' wheelchairs. Dad built this mostly by himself; my job was to sort through a coffee can of nails and straighten out the bent ones on the sidewalk. "Nails don't grow on trees," my father said. When the ramp was finished, raised wooden slats for footing in the center, we painted it grey. We made other changes at the house before we moved in: paint, wallpaper, paneling, a dropped ceiling, carpeting on the stairs, but we were especially proud of the small room and the ramp.

My brother Mike was easily scared; sometimes he screamed at things he saw on television; if anyone started shouting he'd begin to shriek. My father was always loud and physical when he disciplined me. "Stop! You're gonna kill him!" Mike would

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yell. Once I remember Dad and I *did* stop; we went to Mike and calmed him, explaining that sometimes people who love each other fight, too. Mike wiped his eyes and quieted. I went out, and passed my father at the kitchen table, his face in his hands.

Probably what Mike was most afraid of was the lift: an ugly cast-iron derrick which transferred him and Bob from bed to wheelchair to commode. Heavy chains hung from the crossbar; the chains hooked onto pieces of canvas that made a precarious seat. When you pumped a lever, the jangling chains tightened and lifted and swung him over the commode. He cried and trembled. My father sympathized with him and swore at the "goddamned fuckin thing"; he hated it for other reasons. It took too long to place the canvas properly, hook up the chains, maneuver the whole thing and slowly release the pressure, then the canvas had to be unhooked and pulled out from under. It was much easier and faster simply to grab Mike or Bob under the arms and heave.

I came home from school one day and heard a crash, my father yelling, "Damn it Jesus fucking Christ!" and Bobby screaming. I ran into the room and Dad was on the floor, swearing, pounding his fist on the carpet, teeth gritted, unable to move. Bob had fallen in the corner, partway up the wall, his neck bent at a grotesque angle. I froze looking down at my father. "Help your brother, you asshole!" Mom came running down the stairs.

"What happened?"

"Call the doctor!" I shouted. Mike was shrieking from the next room. The doorbell rang—our next-door neighbor. My father said, "You don't let anybody in here, damn it you'll be sorry." I didn't. I said that some shelves had fallen; "Thanks but everything's all right." The doctor came: Bob was unhurt, a nosebleed and a bump on the head; my father had suffered a "slipped disc."

After that we almost always used the lift, though there were times my father was in a hurry, late for his second job, and he and I would lift my brothers. Mom would tell my father, "Careful of your back," and he would snap back at her, "What do you *want* me to do—you want to lift him?—then shut up for godsake." I'd get angry. Bob would say, "I'm sor-

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ry, I can't help it." Mike would cry. Joe most times would go out on the porch or upstairs to his room. Dad would come back later in the evening, long enough to take Bob off and put Mike on the commode. On some jobs he had to have someone lie for him to get the twenty minutes.

In high school I involved myself in every activity I could, mostly sports but also orchestra, newspaper, and chorus. Joe was still very young but old enough to carry the pot upstairs, dump it in the toilet, and rinse it under the bathtub faucet. One day I was walking down the street and saw Joe come out of the house, slam the door and stomp down the front steps, wiping his eyes at his wrists. When I walked in the house, my father was lifting Mike back into his wheelchair from the commode. "Your brother thinks he's too damn good to have to help around here," he said. One thing you never said around my father: *Why do I always have to be the one to do it?*

*

My mother keeps a battered shoe box full of photographs; the corners have been taped again and again but still don't hold; the lid is kept on with rubber bands. If you dumped the photographs from the box it would collapse completely. One year I bought an album for Mom for her birthday: "Now you can throw away that busted-up old shoe box," I said. She never used it. Even a new shoe box would seem wrong to her.

. . . Mammy Etta, young, squinting into the sun, her face too dark to see. My mother as a little girl. My aunts in high school, bobby sox and saddle shoes. A tiny box-camera snapshot, hardly more than an inch square, of Mom and Dad hugging on a park bench during their engagement. My mother with the four of us, her eyes rolled up comically, in make-believe exasperation. Several pictures of Bob and me together, playing. My First Communion in my white suit. Bob's First Communion in the same white suit. Me in my baseball uniform. Bob sitting in a red wagon . . .

There's a picture of Bob and me sitting on the bed in our

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room in the house on Ninth Street; we must be about six and seven years old. He reached up and put rabbit-ears on me. I remember I punched him on the arm for that and he cried. It was probably a rainy day, the only other times we spent in the room were when we were sleeping or being punished. Dad never tolerated lying, and he had a strategy to deal with it. When he asked us who broke the window, who stomped all over the neighbors' flowers, who tore all the pictures out of his baseball magazine before he had a chance to read it, if neither of us confessed, he sent us to our room, without toys, until one of us came out with the truth. We never told on each other; usually about a half-hour is all it would take. Sometimes we struck deals: once I was invited to go to a Phillies game with my friend Peter and his father; I knew that if I admitted to whatever it was (I don't remember), I wouldn't be allowed to go. Bob said that he had done it; we agreed that I owed him the next one. I went to the game. I think my father knew, because Bob wasn't punished after all.

It always took us a while to quiet down at bedtime, and my parents were always yelling up the stairs to go to sleep. When we weren't in bed, wrestling and laughing, we knelt together at the floor-register, a grate that allowed heat to rise from downstairs, and listened to the television and to our parents talking. Sometimes they argued, often about money.

"All I know's my mother raised the five of us on *half* of what you spend," Dad said.

"I offered to go to work. I could help with lunch at the high school in the afternoon. The kids are in school now."

"No, god damn it, I said no."

Bob and I whispered above the grate, usually got caught, went back to bed after a scolding, and crept back to the grate again.

Bob was always awake before me in the morning. He would nudge me, poke me, kick me, and if all else failed, open my eyelids with his fingers, asking, "Dick, are you awake yet?"

Bob and I in the backyard. (Again we're about six and seven—these are some of the last pictures of us together.) We've each just had one of Dad's haircuts, the line across our foreheads straight, angling right to left. The smiles on our faces

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are unreal, a reply to "Say Cheese," but the yard behind us, bats, balls and gloves, capguns, a spilled peach-basket of toys, is alive with memories.

The yard was ours together: there was onion-grass to chew on, crickets to trap under our hands, buttercups, morning-glories climbing the fence by the shed, salamanders under rocks, tiger lilies in the far corner near the rusty post, dandelions my mother boiled and ate for lunch. There was something damp and erotic about the rose-of-sharon that grew by the shed; when the blossoms closed and fell on the ground they looked, to Bob and me, like so many veined, purple-blue *peepees*. After a day or two, they turned brown and mushy and neither of us wanted to touch them. We wanted to know why there were always black ants on the peonies, and how lightning bugs shined. We caught them and kept them in jars. Bob smeared one on the wall of the shed; it left a phosphorescent streak. He wanted to catch enough of them to print his name on the wall, but Mom said that wasn't nice, that we could catch them but we shouldn't hurt them. Both of us thought that was stupid since they always died in the jar anyway, even though we punched holes in the lid. We smeared our names, small, on the short concrete walk in the yard, but they only shined for a few minutes.

And the neighbors' yards: the wire fences served as nothing but reminders that we were off-limits. Usually it was permissible to cross to retrieve a ball from either of our next-door neighbors' yards, so we often threw one over the fence to legitimize a raid on the Schanks' cherry tree. On the other side, the Zimmermans had red and white roses. We ate some of those, too—one petal at a time, with salt from one of those little disposable lunchbox shakers. We argued which were tastier; I liked the red ones, Bob preferred the white.

The grass grew tall in the yard at the foot of ours. We were afraid of the man who lived there. Once Dad had a fight with him. They stood at the fence and swore at each other. The man threatened Dad, who picked up one of our baseball bats and laughed at him. Mom came out; "Put down that bat!" she said to my father and started yelling at the man about his yard and house and about his being mean to Bob and me by keeping our balls whenever they went in his yard and about

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how we were children and he shouldn't scare us and no wonder his wife had left him in his ugly house all by himself. The fight had started because the man made Dad pay for a window we'd broken and then only patched it with cardboard.

There are two small snapshots of Bob and me, aged four and five, in our plastic wading pool in the yard. In one of them, Bob is holding a plastic boat above his head and glaring at me; I am looking at the camera. We must have been fighting over it when I stopped to smile and pose. Timmy Mullin, a playmate from up the block, is also in the picture; he is not in the pool, though. It was the time of the polio scare, and his mother wouldn't let him swim with us. The superstition was that water left standing for any length of time bred crippling germs. That's what had happened to all those people with braces and crutches or in wheelchairs, they'd been swimming in stagnant water. Sometimes Bob and I would splash Timmy, who'd back off yelling, "Stop it! That's polio water! Cut it out!" At least once we sent him home crying. I remember he lost a sneaker climbing the fence in panic; Bob grabbed it and jumped back in the pool with a big splash. I took the sneaker, dunked it, and threw it at Timmy; he wouldn't touch it. He shouted that he was going to tell his father and we'd have to buy him a new pair of sneakers; "And I hope you both get crippled up with polio!" he yelled.

In the other shot, I'm in the pool and Bob is lying on the concrete walk that jutted out past the tool-shed into the yard. On cool days we would do that: the concrete held the heat and it felt good to lie on our bellies and be warmed. When we rose, our shadows, made of water, were left on the walk; by the time they dried and faded, we were cold enough and the walk was warm enough to lie on again. On hot days we had to run from the pool to the shade by the house. I don't know why the walk was there; it went about a third of the way into the yard and stopped. Sometimes we played that it was a dock, and the rest of the yard was water filled with alligators and man-eating fish, and we'd try to push each other from it.

Not long ago, on a visit home, I sat in the kitchen looking through the shoe box with my mother. Most of the pictures

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are in the box face down, so looking through them is like turning over cards. I came to understand why my mother never used the album I'd bought her. To arrange the pictures chronologically, or any other way, would be a fiction. A memory is something that happens. To marshal memories in a particular order is to refuse to be vulnerable to their spontaneous occurrence; it is to substitute a formulation for a feeling. Better to reach in the box, often, and pick a card at random. My mother's shoe box is an emblem of her courage.

I turned over a snapshot taken on my First Communion day. My head and shoulders almost fill the picture, but I'm out of focus. On the concrete walk, very small in the background, just below my right ear, Bob has fallen and is trying to get back on his feet. I remembered those times, how Bob spoke to himself, impatient but encouraging, "Come on now, *push*, now keep your balance, *nnnh*. Good. There. Okay."

And I remembered other times, when I was responsible for bringing Bob home from school. I was in fourth grade, he in third. By then he walked on his toes, the tendons of his calves tightening, pulling his heels off the ground. And one day in particular: Bob is on the ground, I want to get him home because I'm supposed to play football with Pete and his friends. They've never asked me to play with them before: Bob is ruining everything. I grab him by the arm; he screams and cries and won't let me pull him to his feet. I hit him. He cries. I try to pull him up and he screams again. I kick him. He lies there and cries among the horse chestnut cases and yellow leaves stuck to the sidewalk on Ninth Street. A neighbor called my parents. My father said he'd "beat me within an inch of my life" if I ever laid a hand on Bob again.

I remembered watching while Bob was fitted for braces to keep his Achilles' tendons stretched. One night I got slammed in the shins with one of the heavy braces and I knocked Bob out of bed. My mother had to pull my father off me. It was the only time he ever hit me in the face. I had welts all over my cheeks and couldn't go to school the next day. Bob and I didn't sleep together long after that; Dad bought a folding cot for the middle room downstairs. It was getting so he had to be carried up the stairs anyway.

I was holding the picture and shaking. I handed it to my

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mother. "Oh who took this one? You're all blurry," she said. If she noticed the scene in the background, she didn't comment; she turned it face down on the pile of those she'd already looked at. "Here's a good one of Bob," she said. He is sitting in his chair, a blank look on his face, at the end of the concrete walk, where Mom and I always wheeled him when he wanted to be outdoors.

*

St. Francis of Assisi School had a triangular yellow SHELTER sign out front, and we had frequent air-raid drills because, according to the nuns, the Russians were going to bomb us. It was 1957. Bob was in second grade; I was in third. We were afraid. We prayed that the Virgin Mary would stop them.

The sisters told us we need not fear death if we were good Catholics. From what they told us, Bob and I imagined that if the Russians killed us we would get up afterward the way we did when the bell rang while we were playing soldiers in the fields behind the school at recess. Then we would stand in line outside the door—of heaven, not school—and go in and meet Jesus. We went to daily Mass and Tuesday night novenas and tried hard to believe this.

We played soldiers every chance we had. Sometimes it was just the two of us, so we drew blades of grass to see who would be the American; the other could choose to be a German, an Italian, a Japanese, a Korean, a Chinese or a Russian. The game was a modified hide-and-seek; the object was to sneak up undiscovered on the enemy, and kill him by making the most realistic rifle or machine-gun sounds you could. Sometimes we used dry clods of dirt for hand-grenades because they gave off a little puff of smoke-like dust if you hit a rock or a tree with one. More often there would be eight or ten of us from the neighborhood who played. If we played at recess, we used sticks for guns; if we played after school or in the summer, we had plastic rifles or tommy-guns, helmets, army-surplus belts and canteens filled with Kool-Aid.

The game began at opposite ends of the uncut meadow we called "the Prairie," which was soon filled with infantry crawling toward each other in the tall grass, snipers climbing trees,

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soldiers digging foxholes, the verbal imitations of gunfire and explosions, and occasionally the sounds of a nasty argument. The rules of the game were unclear, and we had no referees, so much of the imaginary warfare took the shape of agreements as to who shot whom first, or how close you had to be to shoot someone. The worst thing you could do was refuse to die. "I had you!"

"No you didn't! I was covered! You can't shoot through a tank! I was behind this rock. This rock's a tank, man."

"Ah bullshit, man, you're dead." After that you were ignored, no matter what you did, and you had missed your chance to die dramatically, throwing your rifle in the air, crying out, staggering and tumbling to the ground, which was one of the best parts of the game.

My father used to watch a program on Sunday nights called AIR POWER, narrated by Walter Cronkite. It was comprised of footage documenting all the major air battles and bombings of World War II. Bob and I watched it often. Cronkite's voice came over the drone of the bombers as the doors in the bellies of the planes opened. The bombs, looking like black fish, fell straight down, evenly spaced, and whistled. Then we were looking down on the towns where little puffs of smoke, like the ones our dry clods made, appeared in orderly rows. After that the films showed burning buildings, people crying in the streets and crews of men digging out trapped people and the bodies of the dead.

We became afraid of planes. We watched to see if the doors in their bellies would open. We were ready to run to the shelter of the school if they did. At night I often dreamed that Bob and I were roller-skating on the sidewalk when we heard the drone of a plane overhead; I looked up to see the trickle of bombs beginning to fall. We skated as fast as we could to the school, looking back over our shoulders and hearing the first explosions. When we got to the school, Sister Anne Catherine was in the doorway telling us to hurry. We tried to clatter up the steps in our skates but kept falling down. Bob was crying, and I tried to drag him up the steps. One time he woke me because I was calling his name in my sleep. I told him the dream and we stayed awake the rest of the night and talked.

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The nuns had given us comic books in school. Usually our comics were of Sergeant Rock battling the Japs or Nazis with a gun that said "Ratatatatatatatatatat," but these showed a Catholic family in their fallout shelter, saying the rosary together. We tried to get my father to build a fallout shelter and to say the rosary with us. We talked about what we would do if we survived the bombs. We agreed that we'd play possum so the enemy would think that we were dead. Sometimes in bed at night we would practice keeping still and holding our breath.

My parents had a *World Atlas*, and in the back of it were color plates of the flags of all the countries of the world. We tore out those pages and stuck them up in the window of our bedroom. We weren't sure who the enemy was—the Germans or the Japanese or the Italians or the Koreans or the Chinese or, probably, the Russians—but the idea was that a pilot flying over Ninth Street would spot his flag on our window and not bomb our house.

The nuns at school were sure the enemy was Russia. Russians hated Jesus, and they loved to torture people to test their faith. They would try to make us deny Jesus like Saint Peter. If we were caught alone, they would try to make us lead them to our families so they could kill them too.

Isaiah Slonaker was my idea of a Russian. He was big—an eighth-grader—and bullied Bob and me almost daily. He was dark and ugly; he walked with a sort of lurch and talked funny; it was hard to make out what he said, and we knew that the other eighth-graders laughed at him. Bob and I feared and hated him; we thought his name was as weird and ugly as he was.

It was that spring, of 1957, that Bob began to weaken and have trouble with stairs; occasionally he'd fall on the way home from school. One day he fell, and I was giving him a hand getting up, when Isaiah was suddenly there. He pushed me, and Bob went down again. "Leave us alone, you Commie," I said.

"What you call me?"

"You're a Commie Russian," Bob said. He'd gotten himself on all fours, and Isaiah grabbed him by the hair. "Take that back," he said and pulled. Bob started crying.

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"I take it back, okay, I take it back." Isaiah let go.

"Leave him alone," I said.

"What it to you, punk-face?" He came after me and got me in a headlock and rapped me on the head with his knuckles until I cried. When he let me go, I swung at him and hit him as high as I could reach, on the shoulder. "You can't even talk right," I yelled at him and ran across the street. Bob tried to run. Isaiah caught him and knocked him down, hard, on a low picket fence that bordered someone's front yard. He shouted something across the street at me and lurched away.

Bob's shirt was torn and his back and ribs were scraped and bleeding. Dad called the Slonakers while Mom painted Bob's ribs with mercurochrome. He must have got Isaiah's father on the phone. He started yelling, "Don't give me that crap. That's no excuse. Next time I'll call the cops. Oh yeah? You better hope I don't come over there, that's all I have to say." My mother called the school.

The next day Bob was absent from school, but Isaiah and I had to go to the principal's office and apologize to each other. There were four nuns in the room, looking sternly at us and slowly shaking their heads. After Sister Elizabeth Mary told Isaiah he could leave, they all sat down and explained to me that I should *never* make fun of Isaiah again because he couldn't help the way he walked and slurred his words because he had a terrible disease called palsy.

*

Mike made it to his feet a few times, but he could only take a few steps before he fell. He screamed then, as if he'd broken something, and continued screaming, sometimes banging his head on the floor, until my mother came to gather him up and quiet him. I remember him in his highchair at meals; if he dropped his spoon, he shrieked and rocked and banged his head so hard against the back of the chair that he had lumps. Dad tried to discipline him out of this by removing him from the table, or by threatening to spank him or to take away his crayons and coloring book. Sometimes a little beer in a plastic cup would quiet him. Dad fixed a pad of foam rubber to the back of his chair with electrician's tape.

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Mike stayed in the highchair for a long time. When Bob began to outgrow his wheelchair, Dad bought a larger one, second-hand, from the hospital, and Mike inherited Bob's old one. He never outgrew it.

Mike became a good talker. When it came to TV shows he'd seen, sports events, things that happened at the crippled children's school he went to, or what funny thing Mom, Dad, Joe or Bob had said while I was out, he could really bring back the story alive, reaching far back into the details that led up to the event, and sometimes losing his audience before he came to the point. He loved company though we had few visitors during that time. One day the newsboy was let into the living room while Mom went to find some money for him. I was reading, and I looked up and nodded a hello; Bob did the same. The newsboy was uncomfortable with the two wheelchairs. Mom took a long time finding the money, and the boy, by now rocking back and forth and looking at the floor, asked me what I was reading. "First time he went fishing," Mike said, "he went with Eddie Zimmerman and his father. They used to be our next-door neighbors when we lived on Ninth Street and Pappy Hoffman used to live here but he died and we live here and Eddie and his sister Susie aren't our next-door neighbors now and they went fishing out near Quakertown and Eddie caught three big fish and Mr. Zimmerman put them in a big tub so we could see them still alive when they got home. Bobby put his fingers in the water and touched them but I was too afraid and Mrs. Zimmerman said they were dirty fish and they should throw them out not eat them . . ." Mom came back with the money. As the boy was leaving, Mike shouted, "It was Eddie caught the fish and that's why Dick keeps reading fishing books!"

The screaming went on though, mostly at night. The fears and frustrations of the day became the nightmares and defeat that woke us all at night for the next few years. At first the doctor said that he would grow out of them; later he said it was an electrochemical problem and recommended a diet; nothing worked.

Sleeping in the downstairs room with him, Bob knew more about Mike's nightmares than the rest of us; somehow he became used to being awakened by screams a few feet away,

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and he even grew able to anticipate them. If we slept undisturbed some nights, it was because Bob woke him just before he would have screamed. They talked; there was something between them, sharing the same small room, the same fate, that I can't know. Once I asked Bob if he knew what Mike's nightmares were about. "He's scared," he said.

"But what's he scared of?"

"Nothing. He's just scared. Sometimes it's a clown. He says a big clown laughs and laughs at him and tries to kill him. Once he told me that a puppet chased him and knocked him down and nailed him to the floor. Another time he told me there were worms in his bed. He's just scared, that's all." He gave me a second glance then, as if he were going to go on, but he didn't. They shared something in that room, but probably there is no name for it.

*

There is little that speaks of the lives of my brothers in our house. The makeshift downstairs bedroom is a sewing room now; the ramp is gone from the back porch. On one wall of the living room are two small crucifixes from my brothers' caskets, but there is new furniture in the room, and it is arranged differently, no longer leaving room for two wheelchairs. It is as if the house has healed.

Joe told me of a time when he brought a girl home. He and his date were sitting in the living room with Mom. The girl noticed the two crucifixes on the wall and, trying to make conversation, said to my mother, "You must be very religious."

"No. What makes you say that?"

"I just saw those two crosses there. Is that some kind of Catholic thing, to have two together?"

Joe tried to change the subject. "I'll tell you about it later," he said, standing up. "We'd better go if we're going to make the movie."

"Don't be so rude," the girl said. "I was talking to your mother. We have time."

But Mom was already crying. "Those are Joey's brothers," she said, "Bobby and Mikey."

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Joe says that he was angry, but he doesn't know if he was angry at my mother or the girl. Mom said, "I'm sorry. Please. Go out. Have fun. Forget it. I'm okay."

When I visit home, I sleep on the convertible sofa in the living room. Usually I stay up very late, watching the late movies and drinking more than I should. I still see the room the way it was, with its unique arrangement of sofa and chairs. I can still look into the middle room from there and see the two chairs folded outside the louvered doors, waiting for morning.

Once, after a particularly fitful night, I woke tangled in the sheet and lying across the bed so that the first thing I saw was the pair of crucifixes on the wall above me: Jesus in bronze on silver, twice. I didn't think of either of my brothers; I thought of how their wheelchairs, the brown one and the green one, had been transformed into these two crosses, as if that had been their fate all along. But later that day I found the wheelchairs.

I had gone down into the cellar, for the first time in years, to look for an old fishing reel of mine. It was a hot afternoon, and the cool of the cellar was pleasant; the small street-level windows were cloudy with dirt, cobwebbed, and filtered a soft grey light over everything. Under one window was the blue formica table where I had spent much teenage solitude tying trout flies, building model planes, or examining ants, flies or pondwater with my Gilbert microscope. My home-made barbells, pieces of pipe with cans of cement on the ends, were propped in the corner by the tool-closet.

Inside the closet, the old bait-casting reel was on a shelf among my father's tools, an old brown baseball, jars of nuts and bolts and cans of nails. The reel was rusty but still turned; it needed oil. The line had rotted on the spool and would have to be cut off. I picked up the baseball and remembered how my father used to take a brush and scrub the horsehide with bleach to get it white again.

My mother had gone shopping; if she had been upstairs, she would have called to me, "What happened? You get lost down there?" For years I came down here for peace and solitude. Tying a Royal Coachman or a Bucktail, I could feel my

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flyrod flex with the fight of a big brown trout; looking at amoebas in a drop of water, I imagined myself a scientist searching for a cure to Muscular Dystrophy.

I saw the rear wheel, blue fender and red reflector of my bicycle jutting from behind what used to be the coal bin at the far end of the cellar. I walked past the oil burner and around the bin. My bicycle, with the handlebars wrenched crooked and both tires flat, leaned against the wall; next to it were the wheelchairs, folded, the footrests turned up, brakes locked. Nearby were my brothers' cots, also folded; and the commode, open, without its pot; and the lift, attached from its chains to the wall by cobwebs.

I remembered my father's struggles to locate and raise the money for these things and felt anger at their waste. Someone else would need them; they should have been given away, donated to some agency. I felt an urge to pull out my bicycle, straighten the handlebars, see if the tires would hold air, but I couldn't get to it without moving the wheelchairs. I couldn't bring myself to move them. On the floor were schoolbooks and notebooks, coloring books, and the baseball scorebooks that Bob had kept of televised games. I remembered his knowledge of baseball; he could provide you with statistics on nearly every player in the major leagues. A daddy-long-legs walked along the armrest of the smaller of the two wheelchairs. I couldn't disturb a thing.

I walked back to the tool-closet and closed the door. I wiped some dust from the top of the blue table with my hand and stared at the fishing reel I had been carrying. Without being aware of it, I had begun to cry. I leaned on the table and grieved again, thoughtless and full of confusion, as I had not done in a very long time.

*

My mother is puzzled when people express their admiration: "How did you do it?" She doesn't know. It's the wrong question, and asked in the past tense, it is doubly wrong and painful. "You just do it," she says.

She never imagined another life. The future was foreordained. She held to a pathetic sliver of hope—for a medical

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discovery—but dreams of a different life were useless self-indulgence.

My mother had been a singer. I don't believe she ever meant to make a career of it, but she had sung in local bars and clubs during the war. When I was little, she sang all day—show tunes: *When You Walk Through A Storm, Moon River, Appleblossom Time.* She liked Sinatra, Perry Como, Johnny Horton. She stopped singing; I don't remember exactly when. The record-player broke and was never repaired. Except for the offerings on TV, our house remains without music.

Weekdays began at five. She perked the coffee, then woke my father. She woke Bob and Mike and dressed them in their beds (without pulling up their pants, because when Dad came downstairs it was time for them to use the commode). She packed five lunches, woke Joe and me, and served breakfast. By seven Dad had placed my brothers in their wheelchairs and gone to work. Joe or I would empty the pot upstairs, the other helping Mom to get Bob and Mike into their coats and hats. At seven-thirty the school bus came. It was a yellow van with flashing lights, CAUTION:CRIPPLED CHILDREN painted on the front and back, and with a wheelchair lift built onto the right side. Joe and I then left for school. Except for those days when she went shopping, Mom stayed home; she didn't watch much television and wasn't much of a reader. She cleaned, sewed, baked, and did laundry till we returned from school.

I understand my father better; sometimes he wanted out.

One evening, when I was fifteen, I came home to my mother sitting alone in the living room. Bob and Mike were already in bed; Joe was staying with a cousin. I could see that she'd been crying. While I was hanging my jacket in the closet, she said, "Your father's gone."

"Where?"

"Gone!" she said.

"What are you talking about?"

"He found some woman and he says he loves her."

"That's ridiculous! What happened?"

"He wants to send your brothers to The Good Shepherd Home. I won't! I won't!" she cried and grabbed my arm.

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"Help me. Don't let him send them away."

I hated him then, but I wanted to go away and have another life as much as he did.

He came in that night, very late, and slept on the sofa. In the morning he lifted my brothers into their wheelchairs. No one said a word until Bob cried out, "Don't send us to a home! Don't go away, Dad. Please!"

"I'll be good, Dad. I'll be good," Mike cried.

My father slammed his fist into the wall and kicked over a chair. "God *damn* it!" he shouted. "I'm not some fuckin superman! What kind of life is this? What kind of life is this? You'll be the death of me, all of you!" He jumped up and down and screamed and knocked things over. Mom and Joe stood in the corner. Everyone was crying but me; I didn't know what to do but stay out of his way. I'd seen him rage but never like this. He became more and more hysterical, cursing and swearing, until he shouted, "I can't take it anymore!" He backed against the wall and slid down it until he was sitting on the floor with his knees drawn up and his face in his hands, crying quietly and repeating, "I can't. I can't. I can't."

After a few moments, Mom nudged Joe toward me; I put my hand on his shoulder as she went to my Dad. I was afraid he might blow up at her. She knelt next to him and took his head in her arms, and they cried. My father said, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

He called in sick that day, and when the yellow school bus pulled up in front of the house, he waved it on. He played cards and checkers with Bob and Mike all day and told them again and again that he would never send them away. Never.

*

The fact that I had come so far and on such short notice confirmed what Bob had already grasped. I don't remember how I greeted him. There was terror in his eyes. I felt as if I was bringing him the news of his death.

He was propped in the bed, his hands limp at his sides; under the covers, the soles of his feet were together and his knees splayed. For a moment I saw him as a stranger might, and I realized how years in his wheelchair had left him mis-

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shapen and how horribly his disease had weakened him. The muscles of his back could not support him, and he was kept in the middle of the bed by pillows on both sides. His legs were terribly skinny, atrophied, and his heavy, sagging trunk tapered upward to his frail, bony shoulders and useless arms. He had trouble holding up his head. He hadn't been shaved in a couple of days, and I noticed that his beard grew mostly under his chin, like mine.

Mom, Dad and Joe stood around the bed. Dad said, "You see, your brother Dick's here now. Everything's going to be all right." Then he looked at me as if to ask forgiveness for saying such a stupid thing.

"You going to stay awhile?" Bob asked me.

"Few days," I said, "until you're better." The look he gave me made me turn my head away. I had betrayed him. I promised myself I wouldn't lie to him again.

My father went to the door and motioned for me to join him. There was a sofa at the end of the hall, with Dad's overcoat balled at one end to serve as a pillow; he had tried to get Mom to sleep a bit last night.

"I'm glad you're here. We didn't think he'd make it through last night. Have you eaten? There's a coffee shop downstairs. Maybe you should go down and get us some sandwiches. They're probably open by now. If you just want coffee, there's a machine at the other end of the hall." He took out his wallet, and his hands were shaking.

"Dad," I said and touched him on the arm. He stopped a moment; then he let out a sob and hugged me, crying hard. My father is a big, heavy man and so much taller than me that when I try to comfort him, it's always my head on his shoulder. We sat on the sofa. "This is it," he said. "This is really it." We had expected this so long, and yet we were astonished.

The light above the door to Bob's room was flashing, and a nurse came running down the hall. We ran back to the room. The nurse was readying a suction catheter to enable Bob to breathe more freely. He gagged as she eased the plastic tube up through his nose and down his throat. Dad and I held him upright. He looked from one to the other of us, scared. Mom turned away, and Joe went to her and put his arm around her. The nurse withdrew the tube and wheeled the

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portable unit into the corner. "Thanks," Bob said to her, "that's better." He needed the machine often after that, and he came to welcome its relief. During his last hours, early the next day, he asked for it when it was useless; he was confident that it could help him.

He could not find comfort; ten minutes in any position was all that he could bear. He said his skin hurt. "Move me! Move me!" he cried out. He insisted that my father move him; he said the nurses didn't do it right and that Joe and I were too rough. His discomfort went on until my father couldn't lift him anymore. Dad was beaten and crying. "Bobby, please," he said, "no matter where I put you it still hurts. Please try to bear it. Let Dick try it. Joe. The two of them together. Try it. I can't lift you anymore. I can't."

He was given drugs for the pain, but they made him sleepy, and he was afraid to sleep. "I won't wake up," he said. His resistance to sedatives was magnificent. He asked for coffee. I left the room and went to the coffee machine. I planned to be gone long enough for the sedative to take effect. I stood at the machine and waited, worrying that I was betraying him again. I thought of his pain, his inability to relax, his fear of sleep, and I waited. I drank a cup myself before I finally put another quarter in the machine and carried the cup back to the room.

Bob was delirious. He was talking, but the voice wasn't his. The talk came from childhood: "One potato, two potato, three potato, four . . . ," and a little tune: "Shave 'n a haircut, five cents!" My mother held his hand, crying, and a tiny laugh came through her sobs at the memory of the tune. It was part of a song Dad used to sing to us when we were little. Joe took the coffee I had brought. Dad told me that he thought that this was the end. He said that it was good, that Bob was happy.

Bob squeezed his eyes shut tight, fighting the drug. He relaxed, but as soon as he had dozed off, he woke and looked around the room. When he saw me, he asked if I had brought his coffee. I looked at Joe who said, "You were asleep, and it was getting cold so I drank it. I'll get you another cup." He started for the door, but Bob said, "Never mind, it's lousy coffee anyway." Well into the night, he was given pain medication which he always managed to keep

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from putting him to sleep. He was weakened to the point of dying, but until his final surrender, he did not sleep during the thirty-six hours I was with him.

Nurses came and went; we didn't pay much attention to them. Once I got it through my head that Bob knew he was dying, I was awed. I believe he saw that we were sometimes more afraid than he was. "The doctor told me the Phillies lost again. They got the pitching. Got nobody who can hit the ball." He said that for Joe, who disagreed, "They hit okay, but never when it counts. You know they left eleven runners on base Monday night? That's some kind of record."

"And the errors hurt them," Mom said.

"What's the use of hitting if you can't hit in the clutch?" said Bob.

By nightfall we were all exhausted. No one wanted to leave the room, but the night nurse insisted that, till morning, only one of us was allowed in the room at a time. My father was about to lose his temper, and my mother was shocked at the woman's insensitivity. I was angry too, and I followed the nurse down the hall to her station.

"I don't believe you people!" I railed at her. "My brother is dying. We want to be with him. What kind of rule forbids a family's being with the dying? You think you're God or something? You take your god damned rule and shove it! Who the hell do you think you are?"

She was sitting at a low counter, writing in a chart, and she looked up, pointed her pen at me, and said in a loud whisper, "You think there's a rule? There is no rule. Now listen. You know your brother won't get well. I'm sorry. I really am. But stop and think about your parents. Do you know what they're going to go through after this? You may be young and strong enough to stay up every night till this is over, but your mother . . ."

"Hold it," I said, "okay." I remembered Mike's funeral, and knew very well what the next week would be like. I went back to the room and told my parents that I couldn't get the nurse to budge. Joe said he'd stay with Bob the first three hours.

Mom managed to sleep, and we didn't disturb her. Dad took over for Joe sometime in the middle of the night, and I began my watch at about five o'clock.

The dark of the lounge, Mom's quiet snoring, the plan of a

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rotating watch, was some comfort. When I entered the room, I wasn't ready. Bob was staring straight ahead at something I couldn't see. His mouth was twisted in a snarl, his eyes were fierce, and his face was red with anger. He seemed so far away that I said, "Bob. Bob. It's me. Dick."

"Water," he said. I filled a paper cup and held it to his lips. When he finished drinking, he said, "What was the name that Dad made up for the ghost? Remember? When we were scared? He told us not to worry when we heard a scary noise. A woman's name."

"He always told us it was 'Maggie-behind-the-wallpaper.' "

"That's right," he sighed. "I thought it was something more profound than that." Then he began to laugh.

I gathered our things from the lounge at the end of the hall. Joe was holding my mother. As we were about to leave, Dad wanted to go back in the room one more time, but a nurse barred his way. I put my hand on his shoulder. "Give me the keys to the car," I said.

*

The last I saw of my brother Mike alive, he was being kept alive by a number of machines, receiving oxygen through a small green piece of plastic tubing under his nostrils, an I.V. in his arm, a catheter in his penis to collect his urine in a small bag that hung next to the bed, electrodes taped to his chest so that we could see his heartbeat blipping on a small screen on the table next to his bed. Mom, Dad, Joe and I took shifts being there at the hospital, though Mike had been unconscious for days. He never came out from under the anesthesia after his operation. The burst appendix was only a sign; the doctor told us that the *ph* balance in his body was so far over to the acid side that there was little or no chance of correcting it, although they were trying. So of course we all believed in that one chance; I remember fixing on the image of a small boat at sea, almost capsized, tipping over, but maybe . . . We all held to our small hope.

We were all at home; it was night. His death came to us by telephone. I answered it. The nurse said we could come in the morning. My wife Eileen was asleep upstairs. My parents were crying. I don't remember if I was crying then. They

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weren't crying very loudly, and Joe was weeping silently. Still, Eileen woke and came downstairs. I suppose the phone woke her, and she lay awake, listening to hear if it was what she thought it was. I know that I was crying then because she held me, and I remember looking at her and drying my tears and saying, "Bob." Bob was in his room downstairs, in his bed. I went in, turned on the lamp, and sat down on the bed and took his hand. He was not crying; he was shaking. I started to tell him that it was just that Mike's appendix had burst before they had a chance to remove it, and that, and that . . . and he looked at me and said, "Cut the shit, Dick," and kept shaking. Then we both cried hard. I started sobbing, and he cried quietly, lying on his back, the tears running down into his ears. Eileen came in and put a hand on each of us.

When we went to the hospital the next morning, there were no more tubes, no more electrodes, catheters, hook-ups; just Mike lying there looking calm. A horrible parody of sleep.

I went with my father to pick out a casket. It was like buying a car. A show room of empty caskets with silk pillows, silk linings: mahogany caskets with brass pipes around them; rose-colored caskets of steel with handles screwed on like furniture, three on each side and one on each end like a trunk; dull nickel-colored ones with powder-blue silk linings and so forth. I despised the small man who showed us around and walked with little shuffling steps, bent over, holding his hands together as he spoke very quietly, making little bows as we stopped in front of each casket and rubbing his hands together like a fly. You had to ask how much they were because he did not talk money, saying only, "Now for a little more we have this to offer, very nice, very tasteful . . . and of course if you prefer less of an expense we offer this one also very nice, very nice." And when we asked him how much, he would turn over a little card on the pillow, and the price would be written there. He would make his half-bow again, hands together, and wait. When we walked on, he would turn the card face-down again. My father's stoicism was, I knew, an effort, and he made a selection by saying, "This will do," touching one of them quickly and turning away.

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"And a crucifix?" the man said. "You'll find them in this case over here," and he began to lead us, but I saw my father begin shaking his head, the tears welling up in his eyes again, and I said to the man, "We're going now," steering my father to the door. "Pick something nice; it doesn't matter."

"Yes, yes, I'm sorry, I understand, I understand."

Driving my father home I said I'd wanted to kill the little bastard, but he put his hand on my leg and sighed and said, "Yeah, yeah, I know, but somebody's got to do it."

When Bob died we called the man and told him we wanted exactly the same thing.

*

I hardly remember either of my brothers' funerals, and what I remember is run together. In Allentown, wakes are called "viewings": both viewings were held in the same room of the same funeral parlor; the same priest, old Father Walters, about to retire from the parish, prayed a decade of the rosary. I had to run out from one of them, which one I don't remember, to go to the corner store for some kleenex for my mother. I could have asked someone to go; I guess I needed to go. What I remember is that I couldn't stand to watch my mother dabbing at her swollen eyes and red nose with this miserable, entirely shredded piece of pink tissue. My father, sitting next to her, was leaned far over, elbows on his knees, shaking his head, one hand fisted into the palm of the other. People have always referred to my father as "a big bear of a guy," and there he was, 6′3″ and 230 lbs., balanced precariously, pathetically, on a small folding chair next to my mother in the first row. Maybe I went out for the kleenex for my mother because I couldn't stand to see him sitting there like that, as if the world were too small for him, as if there were nowhere a big chair, a good big chair for him to rest his heavy body in to grieve. He had to perch there, balanced, tense. Maybe the sight of him was a figure for my own feelings. So many flowers the air in there could make you sick, flowers from a refrigerator. Purple velour everything, drapes, kneeler in front of the casket. And who is in the casket?

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Mike. Bob. One of them. In memory both of them.

I have never gone to my brothers' graves alone. I'd be hard put to find them. I know they're next to the gravel road about fifty yards from the great crucifix in the middle of the cemetery; still, it would take me awhile to find them.

The last time I went was with Dad, Mom and Joe. Neither Joe nor I saw any point in it, but there was of course no saying so except to each other. Joe and I rode in the back seat; Dad drove, smoking his pipe. Mom brought a plexiglass box with four wire legs and artificial roses inside it. And a plastic wreath. As we pulled up the gravel path, my mother started crying, and my father looked at her but didn't touch her. We got out of the car, and I helped my mother insert the four wire legs deep into the turf over Mike's grave, the second one in from the road. I was standing between the two stones, and Joe was directly across from me at the foot of the graves. Without any warning, my father dropped to his knees, crying and in a rage, "They can't even keep his god damn grave clean! Look at this! No grass, no nothing!" He was crawling on the grave and picking off rocks and throwing them behind him. One of them pinged on the hubcap of the car. Soon he was crying and pawing, trying to rake the stones off with his hands, frantically. Joe and I stood looking at each other with our mouths open, and then my father looked at me, his eyes red, rolling, an animal in pain; glared at me as if he hated me and looked at Joe, and we both went down on our knees, without thinking, and helped to clear the gravel from the road from Bob's grave. My mother was kneeling by Michael's stone, sitting on her heels, her face in her hands, sobbing.

When I was in Mexico, I saw something I want to put down here. In the cemetery of the village of San Luis Potosi, there is a grave without a name on it for which the "stone" is a tractor-tire sunk halfway in the earth so that its tread seems to be an arrow that arcs up out of the ground and back into it. The tire is painted white, although I don't know whether it was painted first so that the half underground is also white, or painted afterwards. Hanging from the tire, inside its arc, was a small basket of flowers.

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JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

A Poem at Fifty-One

I sit here waiting for her, sit here
with the empty skin drooping over my shoulders
as I had already sat waiting many times before
beside the same window, in the same old chair.
Once in a while, I'd open my notebooks,
find the words I had written float away
into the wilderness on the other side of the paper
like the smoke drifting over the burning-ground
of my own flesh. I shut my tired eyes.
And I try not to think of the quick warm skin
of the eighteen-year-old girl I met last month.
I stretch my lonely lips into an unforgivable grin.
I turn my face over in the darkness of my room
and peer into it; but I don't remember now
when my beard had started to grow.
I let the minute drop the hour to the ground;
but each time it came back, and I had to do this
all over again, to put the mind at ease.
I touch my shoulders; they are bare, contrite,
like the shape of a deserted park bench in the rain.
Was some sort of change coming over me?
Or was it time's empty skin, waiting for an excuse
to advance the blood, to keep it occupied?
My notebooks are there, my pretty wife too,
but I have been with them too long, long in love,
and they have worn me slowly around the edges.
Or maybe it isn't because of *them*, themselves;
it's because of where I came from, and of what
I realized suddenly I was really waiting for:
the life that my life seeks, when I go in
to answer it, but it had gone the other way
to where I couldn't meet it at all,
as I go back to where I was, by the same window,
without a word, waiting for her,
empty skin flapping like truce flags in a losing war.

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Of This Evening

This evening I look at that part of myself
which remains with me, but I do not know
what it is, hard to recognize it any more.
I don't think I can reach it when I want it so much.
Is it because my years have had a lot of weight
on them, or because the world has come to know
what I already know about that part of me?
A curtain rises slowly upon a stage
with nothing to reveal, no scene or spell or time.
And what remains with me is a tricky weapon,
difficult to use. It is not that I face
a total stranger suddenly sometimes,
like some wide door barred in rosewood and iron;
or that I hold that part responsible
for making me grovel in front of the world
that beats around me like my ambitious heart.
Days still pretend to belong;
they see me struggling to push them away
but I seem to have no strength left,
perhaps I shall follow quietly after them.
This evening a part of myself closes in on me,
the room is awfully quiet and empty;
but I can hear the shame and pain of defeat
playing mercilessly about my shoulders,
the key lost, and that part trying to pry
my longing away which sits silent like
a grey owl on a branch of my breath,
eyes wide open in another dumb, dirty trick.

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The Hour Before Dawn

It was the hour before dawn. I awoke.
The street lamp stared lamely at my window
and a world was quiet, bewildered
as though it were afraid it would be lost
among thoughts. I waited for a sound,
a rain to fall and tear this silence
between today and tomorrow.
On a distant tree a light breeze combed
the leaves of darkness without a whisper,
and through the window peered my love and fear
and dreams that were mere dummies to the hour.
Unknowing, I bring my palms together.
I remember the one I loved once,
but she seemed to have another face.
My father, sad-faced father! How very far you are
from this empty room filled only with myself!
Without a sound the dark tree out there
struggles with its death in my life.
The silent world floats beside me;
tomorrow maybe I'll hear my father is dead,
but he might bear the face of my son.
This is the hour when there is
no distance between the two of them. The hour
of awakening, when my speechless voice
echoes only from my father to my son,
coming to rest on the lamp post like a weary nightbird.

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DANA GIOIA

Daily Horoscope

I

Today will be like any other day.
You will wake to the familiar sounds
of the same hour in the same room,
sounds which no alarm is needed to announce.
And lying in the warm half-darkness, wish
for any of the dreams you left, convinced
that any change would be an argosy—
an hour's sleep, an unexpected visit.

But they are lost to you—the dreams, the sleep,
the faceless lovers you desire. Lost
as if your eyes were shut against the light,
and only these dull colors have remained,
the vision never coming into focus,
blurred or obscured this morning and forever.

Beyond your window, something like a wind
is filling in the emptiness of air.
Vast, hungry, and invisible it sweeps
the morning clean of memories, then disappears.
The weather changes randomly. Rain
is falling from another planet
but cannot wash the daylight off
into familiar shapes. These walls, these streets,
this day can never be your home, and yet
there is no other world where you could live,
and so you will accept it.

Just as others,
waking to sunlight and the sound of leaves,
accept the morning as their own, and walk
without surprise, through orchards crossed by streams,
where swift, cold water is running over stone.

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II

Nothing is lost. Nothing is so small
that it does not return.
Imagine
that as a child on a day like this
you held a newly-minted coin and had
the choice of spending it in any way
you wished.
Today the coin comes back to you,
the date rubbed out, the ancient mottoes vague,
the portrait covered with the dull shellac
of anything used up, passed on, disposed of
with something else in view, and always worth
a little less each time.
Now it returns,
and you will think it unimportant, lose
it in your pocket change as one more thing
that's not worth counting, not worth singling out.
That is the mistake you must avoid today.
You sent it on the journey to yourself.
Now hold it in your hand. Accept it as
the little you have earned today.
And realize
that you must choose again but over less.

III

Do not expect that if your book falls open
to a certain page, that any phrase
you read will make a difference today,
or that the voices you might overhear
when the wind moves through the yellow-green
and golden tent of autumn, speak to you.

Things ripen or go dry. Light plays on the
dark surface of the lake. Each afternoon
your shadow walks beside you on the wall,
and the days stay long and heavy underneath
the distant rumor of the harvest. One

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more summer gone,
and one way or another you survive,
dull or regretful, never learning that
nothing is hidden in the obvious
changes of the world, that even the dull
reflection of the sun on tall, dry grass
is more than you will ever understand.

And only briefly then
you touch, you see, you press against
the surface of impenetrable things.

IV

Beware of things in duplicate:
a set of knives, the cufflinks in a drawer,
the dice, the pair of Queens, the eyes
of someone sitting next to you.
Attend that empty minute in the evening
when looking at the clock, you see
its hands are fixed on the same hour
you noticed at your morning coffee.
These are the moments to beware
when there is nothing so familiar
or so close that it cannot betray you:
a twin, an extra key, an echo,
your own reflection in the glass.

V

The stars now rearrange themselves above you
but to no effect. Tonight,
only for tonight, their powers lapse,
and you must look toward earth. There will be
no comets now, no pointing star
to lead where you know you must go.

Look for smaller signs instead, the fine

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disturbances of ordered things when suddenly
the rhythms of your expectation break
and in a moment's pause, another world
reveals itself behind the ordinary.

And one small detail out of place will be
enough to let you know: a missing ring,
a breath, a footfall or a sudden breeze,
a crack of light beneath a darkened door.

VI

News will arrive from far away: the phone
rings unexpectedly at night,
and a voice you almost recognize
will speak. Soft and familiar,
it mentions names you haven't heard for years,
names of another place, another time,
that street by street restore
the lost geography of childhood.

Half-asleep you listen in the dark
gradually remembering where you are.
You start to speak. Then silence.
A dial tone. An intervening voice.
Or nothing. The call is finished.
Not even time to turn the lights on.
Now just the ticking of the clock,
the cold disorder of the bed.

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ANDREW HUDGINS

He Imagines His Wife Dead: Sidney Lanier, 1878

I'd just leapt quickly to the curb
to keep from being run down by a horse
when suddenly I understood my wife might die,
and since that time I've thought of little else
as if the threatened mind is trying
to keep from being taken by surprise.
And worse, it tries to find the benefits:
the joys of flirting and games of courtship—
all things I loved but have no use for now.
How can I blame the mind? It wants to live
and will be ruthless to that end
as a plant that's moved into a darker room
will drop the lower, inessential leaves
to keep the growing tip alive. But the heart
depends on more than blood. It needs a cause.
I left my dull heart beating when I slept
and found it beating when I woke
to Mary smiling oddly in her fever
as she lay tangled in her sweaty sheets.
Her eyes, unfocused and afraid,
were a blue I'd never seen in eyes before
as if a jay were caught inside her head
and through her eyes I saw it leaping back and forth
and trying to extend its bright blue wings.
It scared me more than prison camp or war.
My Mary is my only love
that's not a subterfuge for death.

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The Yellow Steeple

On my way home from work, I jumped the fence
and cut across the Baptist cemetery.
As I walked over Sarah Pratt,
I saw a workman standing on a scaffold
and swatting a coat of yellow paint
over the peeling whitewash on the steeple.
He dropped a can of paint, and as it fell
the paint dispersed into a mist
and spread a rain of yellow dots
across a corner of the cemetery—
the bushes, trees, headstones, and me.
It ruined my coat; I didn't care:
I felt like Danaë when she
was loved by Zeus in the golden rain.
Then, looking up, I saw a hawk.
It didn't move at all—not once—
but hung arrested in the air
till I released the breath I held
in awe of its pin-point, predatory grace.
Still watching it as I walked home,
I barked my shins on a marble angel,
slid down a bank of slick white mud,
fell in the creek and came up laughing.

It was one of those rare sustaining days
when you're absolutely sure you have a soul.

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Sidney Lanier: His Wife

My wife is not afraid of dirt.
She spends each morning gardening,
stooped over, watering, pulling weeds,
removing insects from her plants
and pinching them until they burst.
She won't grow marigolds or hollyhocks,
just onions, eggplants, peppers, peas—
things we can eat. And while she sweats
I'm working on my poetry and flute.
Then growing tired of all that art,
I've strolled out to the garden plot
and seen her pull a tomato from the vine
and bite into the unwashed fruit
like a soft hot apple in her hand.
The juice streams down her dirty chin
and tiny seeds stick to her lips.
Her eye is clear, her body full of light
and when, at night, I hold her close,
she smells of mint and lemon balm.

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WILLIAM HATHAWAY

Crab in the Hole, Crab in the Hand

for Simone

I can't hear his scrape because the surf
keeps slap-smacking on the heavy sand
and those wheeling birds slice the air
with righteous screeches, but he moves
down there. A few crumbs tremble
on his hole's lip and a grainy rivulet
streams into the abyss. Oh, he's down
there all right: the hermit in his crusted
shell, all bearded and sea-stained.
If I wait long enough an arm will poke
out, elbow first, and maybe a beady
eye on a stalk. That is the way you
behave when everyone wants to eat you.

But I don't eat this kind. At Punta
Sabbione on the Adriatica I grabbed
little scuttlers from the shallows
and tore, two fingers at the eyes,
carapace from abdomen to scoop
out that salty marmalade: crab eggs.
Hands must respect, but never fear
the crabs to do this right. Doubt:
the mildest tremor, will crush shell,
gills and guts together to disgraceful
trash. Do it or don't, no in-between.

Also, I baited the lighthouse rocks
with rotten squids to catch big crabs,
i granchi. When they darkened
the ghostly moonglow of that meat
I pulled them up fast to the flagstones
where they clicked and clattered in rage

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and terror, I suppose. Who knows
how a creature without heart or brain
must feel? *I* was afraid, because those claws
could really cut, and angry that the *marinaii*
laughed to see my craven hand leap back.

But where am I here? Louisiana.
By a sea again in stiff breeze laden
with kelp and iodine, with memories.
Crab in the hole, crab in the fist;
less real than last week's dream
are the crabs I caught. I cannot wait
for the moon to urge this hermit out.
But I tell you this is not just a hole;
there is a crab down there, breathing small
bubbles in the damp, waiting for night.

Hunting Agates at Big Creek

for Michael Colvin

How it soothes me to sit still a long time
by cold waterflow over cold stones;
to look very hard for a long time
at a small place, learning nothing.
But if I did not throw up my head
sometimes to suck in quick a new gout
of chill air it would be no good.

There it all is: atop the loamy cut
great pines joined in looming shadow
against sea-blue with its wistful trace
of cloud. And its one crow,
never in a hurry, flapping down the breeze
dead center in the stream's vast fairway.
Over dunes' undulant ridges,

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soft hummocks and hollows, taluses
of bright chert and ancient coral-chalk
that suddenly whack to life as the kildeer
beats out of the swales. His white bobber
skims in tune with a little jig of wavelets
in shallow rapids and is a speeding gleam
ghosting the log-jammed pools.

The melancholy of these shades is sweet only
beneath a brilliance of lacquered green.
That it all stays still under a wide sky
is good to know as my eyes strain
square feet for agates. I see lozenges
of rosy quartz, limestones gouged
and stream-polished to sensual plaintiveness:
my thumb rubs and rubs as if for luck.
Also conglomerates: pyrogenic loops and coils
from chthonic flames are in frozen meander
through countryrock. Just-plain-holes
suddenly become intricate sea-whorled fossils
lit by a wink of adjacent geode sparkles.

All that and more is there in happy jumble,
but today I only pocket agates.
A rule firmly based on whim, options
always open including the choice to change
it all. I could empty these beauties
to the stream and, head high, legs
limber, follow the flight of the crow.

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JOYCE CAROL OATES

Notes on Failure

To Whom the Mornings stand for Nights,
What must the Midnights—be!
—Emily Dickinson

IF WRITING QUICKENS ONE'S SENSE OF LIFE, like falling in love, like being precariously in love, it is not because one has any confidence in achieving *success*, but because one is most painfully and constantly made aware of *mortality*: the persistent question being, Is this the work I fail to complete, is this the "posthumous" work that will draw forth so much pity . . . ?

The practicing writer, the writer-at-work, the writer immersed in his or her project, is not an entity at all, let alone a person, but some curious mélange of wildly varying states of mind, clustered toward what might be called the darker end of the spectrum: indecision, frustration, pain, dismay, despair, remorse, impatience, outright failure. To be honored in midstream for one's labor would be ideal, but impossible; to be honored after the fact is always too late, for by then another project has been begun, another concatenation of indefinable states. Perhaps one must contend with vaguely warring personalities, in some sort of sequential arrangement?—perhaps premonitions of failure are but the soul's wise economy, in not risking hubris?—it cannot matter, for, in any case, the writer, however battered a veteran, can't have any real faith, any absolute faith, in his stamina (let alone his theoretical "gift") to get him through the ordeal of *creating*, to the plateau of *creation*. One is frequently asked whether the process becomes easier, with the passage of time, and the reply is obvious—*Nothing gets easier with the passage of time, not even the passing of time.*

The artist, perhaps more than most people, inhabits failure, degrees of failure and accommodation and compromise: but the terms of his failure are generally secret. It seems reasonable to believe that failure may be a truth, or at any rate a

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negotiable fact, while success is a temporary illusion of some intoxicating sort, a bubble soon to be pricked, a flower whose petals will quickly drop. If despair is—as I believe it to be—as absurd a state of the soul as euphoria, who can protest that it feels more substantial, more reliable, less out of scale with the human environment—? When it was observed to T. S. Eliot that most critics are failed writers, Eliot replied: "But so are most writers."

Though most of us inhabit degrees of failure or the anticipation of it, very few persons are willing to acknowledge it, out of a vague but surely correct sense that it is not altogether American to do so. *Your standards are unreasonably high, you must be exaggerating, you must be of a naturally melancholy and saturnine temperament* . . . From this pragmatic vantage point "success" itself is but a form of "failure," a compromise between what is desired and what is attained. One must be stoic, one must develop a sense of humor. And, after all, there is the example of William Faulkner who considered himself a failed poet; Henry James returning to prose fiction after the conspicuous failure of his playwriting career; Ring Lardner writing his impeccable American prose because he despaired of writing sentimental popular songs; Hans Christian Andersen perfecting his fairy tales since he was clearly a failure in other genres—poetry, playwriting, life. One has only to glance at *Chamber Music* to see why James Joyce specialized in prose.

Whoever battles with monsters had better see that it does not turn him into a monster. And if you gaze too long into an abyss—the abyss will gaze back into you. So Nietzsche cryptically warns us: and it is not implausible to surmise that he knew, so far as his own battles, his own monsters, and his own imminent abyss were concerned, much that lay before him: though he could not have guessed its attendant ironies, or the ignoble shallowness of the abyss. Neither does he suggest an alternative.

The spectre of failure haunts us less than the spectre of failing—the process, the activity, the absorbing delusionary stratagems. The battle lost, in retrospect, is, after all, a battle necessarily lost to time: and, won or lost, it belongs to another person. But the battle in the process of being lost, each ges-

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ture, each pulsebeat . . . This is the true abyss of dread, the unspeakable predicament. *To Whom the Mornings stand for Nights, / What must the Midnights—be*!

But how graceful, how extraordinary these pitiless lines, written by Emily Dickinson some four years earlier, in 1862:

> The first Day's Night had come—
> And grateful that a thing
> So terrible—had been endured—
> I told my Soul to sing—
>
> She said her Strings were snapt—
> Her bow—to Atoms blown—
> And so to mend her—gave me work
> Until another Morn—
>
> And then—a Day as huge
> As Yesterdays in pairs,
> Unrolled its horror in my face—
> Until it blocked my eyes—
>
> My Brain—begun to laugh—
> I mumbled—like a fool—
> And tho' 'tis Years ago—that Day—
> My Brain keeps giggling—still.
>
> And Something's odd—within—
> That person that I was—
> And this One—do not feel the same—
> Could it be Madness—this?

Here the poet communicates, in the most succinct and compelling imagery, the phenomenon of the ceaseless process of *creating*: the instruction by what one might call the ego that the Soul "sing," despite the nightmare of "Yesterdays in pairs"—the valiant effort of keeping language, forging language, though the conviction is overwhelming that "the person that I was— / And this One—do not feel the same." (For how, a scant poem later, *can* they be the same?) And again, in the same year:

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The Brain, within its Groove
Runs evenly—and true—
But let a Splinter swerve—
'Twere easier for You—

To put a Current back—
When Floods have slit the Hills—
And scooped a Turnpike for Themselves—
And trodden out the Mills—

The Flood that is the source of creativity, and the source of self-oblivion: sweeping away, among other things, the very Soul that would sing. And is it possible to forgive Joseph Conrad for saying, in the midst of his slough of despair while writing *Nostromo*—surely one of the prodigious feats of the imagination, in our time—that writing is but the "conversion of nervous force" into language?—so profoundly bleak an utterance that one supposes it must be true. For, after all, as the busily productive Charles Gould remarks to his wife, a man must apply himself to *some* activity.

Even that self-proclaimed "teacher of athletes," that vehement rejector of "down-hearted doubters . . . / Frivolous, sullen, moping, angry, affected, dishearten'd, atheistical," that Bard of the American roadway who so wears us out with his yawp of barbaric optimism, and his ebullient energy—even the great Whitman himself confesses that things are often quite different, quite different indeed. When one is alone, walking at the edge of the ocean, at autumn, "held by this electric self out of the pride of which I utter poems"—

O baffled, balk'd, bent to the very earth,
Oppressed with myself that I have dared to open my mouth,
Aware now that amid all that blab whose echoes recoil upon me I have not once had the least idea who or what I am,
But that before all my arrogant poems the real Me stands yet untouch'd, untold, altogether unreach'd,
Withdrawn far, mocking me with self-congratulatory signs and bows,
With peals of distant ironical laughter at every word I have written

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Pointing in silence to these songs, and then to the sand beneath.

—"As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life"

Interesting to note that these lines were published in the same year, 1860, as such tirelessly exuberant and more "Whitmanesque" poems as "For You O Democracy," "Myself and Mine" ("Myself and mine gymnastic ever, / To stand the cold or heat, to take good aim with a gun, to sail a / boat, to manage horses, to beget superb children"), and "I Hear America Singing." More subdued and more eloquent is the short poem, "A Clear Midnight," of 1881, which allows us to overhear the poet in his solitude, the poet no longer in the blaze of noon on a public platform:

This is thy hour O Soul, thy free flight into the wordless,
Away from books, away from art, the day erased, the lesson done,
Thee fully forth emerging, silent, gazing, pondering the themes thou lovest best,
Night, sleep, death and the stars.

One feels distinctly honored, to have the privilege of such moments: to venture around behind the tapestry, to see the threads in their untidy knots, the loose ends hanging frayed.

Why certain individuals appear to devote their lives to the phenomenon of interpreting experience in terms of structure, and of language, must remain a mystery. It is not an alternative to life, still less an escape from life, it *is* life: yet overlaid with a peculiar sort of luminosity, as if one were, and were not, fully inhabiting the present tense. Freud's supposition—which must have been his own secret compulsion, his sounding of his own depths—that the artist labors at his art to win fame, power, riches, and the love of women, hardly addresses itself to the fact that, such booty being won, the artist often intensifies his effort: and finds much of life, apart from that effort, unrewarding. Why, then, this instinct to interpret; to transpose flickering and transient thoughts into the relative permanence of language; to give oneself over to decades of obsessive labor, in the service of an elusive "transcendental"

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ideal, that, in any case, will surely be misunderstood?—or scarcely valued at all? Assuming that all art is metaphor, or metaphorical, what really *is* the motive for metaphor?—is there a motive?—or, in fact, metaphor?—can one say anything finally, with unqualified confidence, about any work of art?—why it strikes a profound, irresistible, and occasionally life-altering response in some individuals, yet means very little to others. In this, the art of reading hardly differs from the art of writing, in that its most intense pleasures and pains must remain private, and cannot be communicated to others. Our secret affinities remain secret even to ourselves . . . we fall in love with certain works of art, as we fall in love with certain individuals, for no very clear motive.

In 1955, in the final year of his life, as profusely honored as any writer in history, Thomas Mann wryly observed in a letter that he had always admired Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale, "The Steadfast Tin Soldier." "Fundamentally," says Mann, "it is the symbol of my life." And what is the "symbol" of Mann's life? Andersen's toy soldier is futilely in love with a pretty dancer, a paper cut-out; his fate is to be cruelly, if casually, tossed into the fire by a child, and melted down to the shape "of a small tin heart." Like most of Andersen's tales the story of the steadfast tin soldier is scarcely a children's story, though couched in the mock-simple language of childhood; and one can see why Thomas Mann felt such kinship with it, for it begins: "There were once five and twenty tin soldiers, all brothers, for they were the offspring of the same old tin spoon. Each man shouldered his gun, kept his eyes well to the front, and wore the smartest red and blue uniform imaginable. . . . All the soldiers were exactly alike with one exception, and he differed from the rest in having only one leg. For he was made last, and there was not quite enough tin left to finish him. However, he stood just as well on his one leg as the others did on two. In fact he was the very one who became famous."

Is the artist secretly in love with failure, one might ask.

Is there something dangerous about "success," something finite and limited and, in a sense, historical: the passing over from *striving*, and *strife*, to *achievement*—? One thinks again of

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Nietzsche, that most profound of psychologists, who tasted the poisonous euphoria of success, however brief, however unsatisfying: beware the danger in happiness! *Now everything I touch turns out to be wonderful. Now I love any fate that comes along. Who would like to be my fate?*

Yet it is perhaps not failure the writer loves, so much as the addictive nature of incompletion and risk. A work of art acquires, and then demands, its own singular "voice"; it insists upon its integrity; as Gide in his Notebook observed, the artist needs "a special world of which he alone has the key." That the fear of dying or becoming seriously ill in midstream is very real, cannot be doubted: and if there is an obvious contradiction here (one dreads completion; one dreads the possibility of a "posthumous" and therefore uncompleted work), that contradiction is very likely at the heart of the artistic enterprise. The writer carries himself as he would carry a precarious pyramid of eggs, because he is, in fact, a precarious pyramid of eggs, in danger of falling at any moment, and shattering on the floor in an ignoble mess. And he understands beforehand that no one, not even his most "sympathetic" fellow writers, will acknowledge his brilliant intentions, and see, for themselves, the great work he would surely have completed, had he lived.

An affinity for risk, danger, mystery, a certain derangement of the soul; a craving for distress, the pinching of the nerves, the not-yet-voiced; the predilection for insomnia; an impatience with past selves and past creations that must be hidden from one's admirers—why is the artist drawn to such extremes, why are we drawn along with him? Here, a forthright and passionate voice, from a source many would think unlikely:

> There are few of us who have not sometimes wakened before dawn, either after one of those dreamless nights that make us almost enamoured of death, or one of those nights of horror and misshapen joy, when through the chambers of the brain sweep phantoms more terrible than reality itself, and instinct with that vivid life that lurks in all grotesques, and that lends to Gothic art its enduring vitality. . . . Veil after veil of thin dusky gauze is lifted, and by degrees the forms and colors of things are restored to

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> them, and we watch the dawn remaking the world in its antique pattern. The wan mirrors get back their mimic life. . . . Nothing seems to us changed. Out of the unreal shadows of the night comes back the real life that we had known. We have to resume it where we had left off, and there steals over us a terrible sense of the necessity of the continuance of energy in the same wearisome round of stereotyped habits, or a wild longing, it may be, that our eyelids might open some morning upon a world that had been refashioned anew in the darkness . . . a world in which the past would have little or no place, or survive, at any rate, in no conscious form of obligation and regret. . . . It was the creation of such worlds as these that seemed to Dorian Gray to be the true object . . . of life.

That this unmistakably heartfelt observation should be bracketed, in Wilde's great novel, by chapters of near-numbing cleverness, and moralizing of a Bunyanesque—a truly medieval—nature, does not detract from its peculiar poignancy: for here, one feels, Wilde is speaking without artifice or posturing; and that Dorian Gray, freed for the moment from his somewhat mechanical role in the allegory Wilde has assembled, to explain himself to himself, has in fact acquired the transparency—the invisibility—of a mask of our own.

As the ancient legend instructs us, Medusa, the image-bearing goddess of Greek mythology, could not be encountered directly by the hero Perseus, for her power was such that she turned everyone who gazed upon her into stone. (The Gorgon, Medusa, had once been a beautiful woman who had been transformed into a monster—with wings, glaring eyes, tusk-like teeth, and those famous serpents for hair.) Only through shrewd indirection, by means of a polished shield, could she be approached in order to be slain—that is, "conquered" by a mortal man.

Medusa—Perseus—the polished shield: one is led to read the tale as a cautionary parable, which tells us that the inchoate and undetermined event, the act without structure, without the necessary constraint (and cunning) of the human imagination, is too brutal—because too inhuman?—to be

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borne. Perseus, aided by Athene, conquers the barbaric in nature, and in his own nature, by means of *reflection.*

The demonic flood of emotion represented by Medusa is, then, successfully subdued by the stratagems of restraint, confinement, indirection, craftiness, patience—which is to say, by a kind of art: the deliberate artfulness that substitutes intellectual caution for the brashness of primitive instinct. So art labors to give *meaning* to a profusion of *meanings*: its structures—inevitably "exclusive," and therefore inevitably "unjust"—provide a way of seeing with the mind's eye that is unquestionably superior to the eye itself.

(And if Medusa were not terrible of aspect, threatening both sanity and life, who, one wonders, would trouble to gaze upon her? It is precisely the risk she represents, the grave danger, that makes her a Muse.)

Will one fail is a question less apposite, finally, than *can one succeed?*—granted the psychic predicament, the addiction to a worldly skepticism that contrasts (perhaps comically) with the artist's private system of customs, habits, and superstitious routines that constitutes his "working life." (A study should really be done of artists' private systems—that cluster of stratagems, both voluntary and involuntary, that make daily life navigable. Here we would find, I think, a bizarre and ingenious assortment of Great Religions in embryo—a system of checks and balances, rewards, and taboos, fastidious as a work of art. *What is your work-schedule*, one writer asks another, never *What are the great themes of your books?*—for the question is, of course, in code, and really implies *Are you perhaps crazier than I?—and will you elaborate?*)

How to attain a destination is always more intriguing (involving, as it does, both ingenuity and labor) than *what* the destination finally is. It has always been the tedious argument of moralists that artists appear to value their art above what is called "morality": but is not the artist by definition an individual who has grown to care more about the interior dimensions of his art than about its public aspect, simply because—can this be doubted?—he spends all his waking hours, and many of his sleeping hours, in that landscape?

The curious blend of the visionary and the pragmatic that

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characterizes most novelists is exemplified by Joyce's attitude toward the various styles of *Ulysses*, those remarkable exuberant self-parodying voices: "From my point of view it hardly matters whether the technique is 'veracious' or not; it has served me as a bridge over which to march my eighteen episodes, and, once I have got my troops across, the opposing forces can, for all I care, blow the bridge sky-high." And though critics generally focus upon the ingenious relationship of *Ulysses* to the *Odyssey*, the classical structure was one Joyce chose with a certain degree of arbitrariness, as he might have chosen another—*Peer Gynt*, for instance; or *Faust*. That the writer labors to discover the secret of his work is perhaps the writer's most baffling predicament, about which he cannot easily speak: for he cannot write the fiction without becoming, beforehand, the person who *must* write that fiction; and he cannot be that person, without first subordinating himself to the process, the labor, of creating that fiction . . . Which is why one becomes addicted to insomnia itself, to a perpetual sense of things about to fail, the pyramid of eggs about to tumble, the house of cards about to be blown away. Deadpan, Stanislaus Joyce noted in his diary, in 1907: "Jim says that . . . when he writes, his mind is as nearly normal as possible."

But my position, as elaborated, is, after all, only the reverse of the tapestry.

Let us reconsider. Isn't there, perhaps, a very literal advantage, now and then, to failure?—a way of turning even the most melancholy of experiences inside-out, until they resemble experiences of *value*, of *growth*, of *profound significance*? That Henry James so spectacularly failed as a playwright had at least two consequences: it contributed to a nervous collapse; and it diverted him from a career for which he was unsuited (not because he had a too grandly "literary" and ambitious conception of the theatre but because, in fact, his theatrical aspirations were so conventional, so trivial)—thereby allowing him the spaciousness of relative failure. The public catastrophe of *Guy Domville* behind him, James writes in his notebook: "I take up my *own* old pen again—the pen of all my old unforgettable efforts and sacred struggles. To myself—today—I need say no more. Large and full and high the future still opens. It is now indeed that I may do the work of

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my life. And I will." *What Maisie Knew*, *The Awkward Age*, *The Ambassadors*, *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Golden Bowl*—the work of James's life. Which success, in the London theatre, would have supplanted—or would have made unnecessary.

Alice James, the younger sister of William and Henry, was born into a family in which, by Henry's admission, "girls seem scarcely to have had a chance." As her brilliant *Diary* acknowledges, Alice made a career of various kinds of failure: the failure to become an adult; the failure to become a "woman" in conventional terms; the failure to realize her considerable intellectual and literary gifts; the failure—which strikes us as magnificently stubborn—to survive. (When Alice discovered that she had cancer of the breast, at the age of 43, she wrote rhapsodically in her diary of her great good fortune: for now her long and questionable career of invalidism had its concrete, incontestable, deathly vindication.)

Alice lies on her couch forever. Alice, the "innocent" victim of fainting spells, convulsions, fits of hysteria, mysterious paralyzing pains, and such nineteenth-century female maladies as nervous hyperesthesia, spinal neurosis, cardiac complications, and rheumatic gout. Alice, the focus of a great deal of familial attention; yet the focus of no one's interest. Lying on her couch she does not matter in the public world, in the world of men, of history. She does not count; she *is* nothing. Yet the *Diary*, revealed to her brothers only after her death, exhibits a merciless eye, an unfailingly accurate ear, a talent that rivals "Harry's" (that is, Henry's) for its astuteness, and far surpasses his for its satirical and sometimes cruel humor. Alice James's career invalidism deprives her of everything; yet, paradoxically, of nothing. The triumph of the *Diary* is the triumph of a distinct literary voice, as valuable as the voice of Virginia Woolf's celebrated diaries.

> I think if I get into the habit of writing a bit about what happens, or rather what doesn't happen, I may lose a little of the sense of loneliness and isolation which abides with me. . . . Scribbling my notes and reading [in order to clarify] the density and shape the formless mass within. Life seems inconceivably rich.

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Life seems inconceivably rich—the sudden exclamation of the writer, the artist, in defiance of external circumstances.

The invalid remains an invalid. She dies triumphantly young. When a nurse wishes to commiserate with her about her predicament, Alice notes in her diary that destiny—any destiny—because it *is* destiny—is fascinating: thus pity is unnecessary. One is born not to suffer but to negotiate with suffering, to choose or invent forms to accommodate it.

Every commentator feels puritanically obliged to pass judgment on Alice. As if the *Diary* were not a document of literary worth; as if it doesn't surpass in literary and historical interest most of the publications of Alice's contemporaries, male or female. This "failure" to realize one's gifts may look like something very different from within. One must remember that, in the James family, "an interesting failure had more value than too-obvious success"—as it does to most observers.

In any case Alice James creates "Alice," a possibly fictitious person, a marvelous unforgettable voice. It is Alice who sinks unprotesting into death; it is Alice who says: "I shall proclaim that anyone who spends her life as an appendage to five cushions and three shawls is justified in committing the sloppiest kind of suicide at a moment's notice."

In Cyril Connolly's elegiac "war-book" *The Unquiet Grave, A Word Cycle by Palinurus* (1945), the shadowy doomed figure of Palinurus broods upon the melancholic but strengthening wisdom of the ages, as a means of "contemplating" (never has the force of that word been more justified), and eventually rejecting, his own suicide. Palinurus, the legendary pilot of Aeneas, becomes for the thirty-nine-year-old Connolly an image of his own ambivalence, which might be termed "neurotic" and self-destructive—unless one recalls the specific historical context in which the idiosyncratic "word cycle" was written, between the autumn of 1942 and the autumn of 1943, in London. *The Unquiet Grave* is a journal in perpetual metamorphosis; a lyric assemblage of epigrams, reflections, paradoxes, and descriptive passages; a commonplace book in which the masters of European literature from Horace and Virgil to Goethe, Schopenhauer, Flaubert, and beyond, are employed, as voices in Palinurus' meditation. Palinurus suf-

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fered a fate that, in abbreviated form, would appear to cry out for retribution, as well as pity:

> Palinurus, a skillful pilot of the ship of Aeneas, fell into the sea in his sleep, was three days exposed to the tempests and waves of the sea, and at last came to the sea shore near Velia, where the cruel inhabitants of the place murdered him to obtain his clothes: his body was left unburied on the seashore.
>
> (Lemprière)

Connolly's meditation upon the temptations of death takes the formal structure of an initiation, a descent into hell, a purification, a cure—for "the ghost of Palinurus must be appeased." Approaching forty, Connolly prepares to "heave his carcass of vanity, boredom, guilt and remorse into another decade." His marriage has failed; the France he has loved is cut off from him, as a consequence of the war; it may well be that the world as he has known it will not endure. He considers the rewards of opium-smoking, he broods upon the recent suicides of four friends, he surrenders his lost Eden and accommodates himself to a changed but evidently enduring world. The word cycle ends with an understated defense of the virtues of happiness, by way of a close analysis of Palinurus' complicity in his fate:

> As a myth . . . with a valuable psychological interpretation, Palinurus clearly stands for a certain will-to-failure or repugnance-to-success, a desire to give up at the last moment, an urge toward loneliness, isolation, and obscurity. Palinurus, in spite of his great ability and his conspicuous public position, deserted his post in the moment of victory and opted for the unknown shore.

Connolly rejects his own predilection for failure and self-willed death only by this systematic immersion in "Palinurus' " desire for the unknown shore: *The Unquiet Grave* achieves its success as a unique work by way of its sympathy with failure.

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Early failure, "success" in being published of so minimal a nature it might be termed failure, repeated frustrations may have made James Joyce possible: these factors did not, at any rate, humble him.

Consider the example of his first attempt at a novel, *Stephen Hero*, a fragmented work that reads precisely like a "first novel"—ambitious, youthful, flawed with the energies and naive insights of youth, altogether conventional in outline and style, but, one would say, "promising." (Though conspicuously less promising than D. H. Lawrence's first novel *The White Peacock*.) Had Joyce found himself in a position to publish *Stephen Hero*—had his other publishing experiences been less disheartening—he would have used the material that constitutes *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*; and that great novel would not have been written. As things evolved, Joyce retreated, and allowed himself ten years to write a masterpiece: and so he rewrote *Stephen Hero* totally, using the first draft as raw material upon which language makes a gloss. *Stephen Hero* presents characters and ideas, tells a story: *A Portrait of the Artist* is about language, *is* language, a portrait-in-progress of the creator, as he discovers the range and depth of his genius. The "soul in gestation" of Stephen Dedalus gains its individuality and its defiant strength as the novel proceeds; at the novel's conclusion it has even gained a kind of autonomy—wresting from the author a *first-person* voice, supplanting the novel's strategy of narration with Stephen's own journal. Out of unexceptional and perhaps even banal material Joyce created one of the most original works in our language. If the publication of *Dubliners* had been less catastrophic, however, and a clamor had arisen for the first novel by this "promising" young Irishman, one might imagine a version of *Stephen Hero* published the following year: for, if the verse of *Chamber Music* (Joyce's first book) is any measure, Joyce was surely not a competent critic of his own work at this time; and, in any case, as always, he needed money. If *Stephen Hero* had been published, *Portrait* could not have been written; without *Portrait*, its conclusion in particular, it is difficult to imagine the genesis of *Ulysses* . . . So one speculates; so it seems likely, in retrospect. But James Joyce was protected by the unpopularity of his work. He enjoyed, as his brother

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Stanislaus observed, "that inflexibility firmly rooted in failure."

The possibilities are countless. Can one imagine a D. H. Lawrence whose great novel *The Rainbow* had enjoyed a routine popular fate, instead of arousing the most extraordinary sort of vituperation ("There is no form of viciousness, of suggestiveness, that is not reflected in these pages," said a reviewer for one publication; the novel, said another reviewer, "had no right to exist"); how then could *Women in Love*, fueled by Lawrence's rage and loathing, have been written? And what of the evangelical *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, in its several versions? In an alternative universe there is a William Faulkner whose poetry (variously, and ineptly, modelled on Swinburne, Eliot, and others) was "successful"; there is a Faulkner whose early, derivative novels gained him a substantial public and commercial success. Imitation Hemingway in *Soldiers' Pay*, imitation Huxley in *Mosquitoes*—with the consequence that Faulkner's own voice might never have developed. (For when Faulkner needed money—and he always needed money—he wrote as rapidly and as pragmatically as possible.) That his great, idiosyncratic, difficult novels—*The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, Light in August, Absalom, Absalom!*—held so little commercial promise allowed him the freedom, the spaciousness, one might even say the privacy, to experiment with language as radically as he wished: for it is the "inflexibility" of which Stanislaus Joyce spoke that genius most requires.

But the genius cannot know that he is a genius—not really: he has hopes, he has premonitions, he suffers raging paranoid doubts, but he can have, in the end, only himself for measurement. Success is distant and illusory, failure one's loyal companion, one's stimulus for imagining that the next book will be better—for, otherwise, why write? The impulse can be made to sound theoretical, and even philosophical, but it is, no doubt, as physical as our blood and marrow. *This insatiable desire to write something before I die, this ravaging sense of the shortness and feverishness of life, make me cling . . . to my one anchor*—so Virginia Woolf, in her diary, speaks for us all.

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ELIZABETH KNIES

The Great Loves

I dreamed
that after all
we did see
each other again.
It had been
a long time,
and your features
had grown indistinct,
but I knew at once
that it was you.
Dante knew Beatrice
at first sight
and that love
lasted all his life,
so I do not dispute
this wound. In fact
I am glad of it,
though you
will probably
never come to me again,
except in the manner
of dreams.

Summer

Summer at its height,
heavy and beautiful,
brought you, like a character
out of a fable.

How strange are the workings
of the world! In you

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I recognize something:
it draws me, irresistible,
and it has nothing to do
with anything that can be explained.

It has transfigured everything.

The waterfront thick with fog and mist and flowers.
All around us wetness
drops from the trees;
the grass is drenched.
I incline my head
toward whatever meaning can be construed.
My step and yours
are a perfect fit.
This landscape is from another world:
it may be the one where we knew each other.

The First Hot Night

It is the first hot night of summer,
the pitch black
broken by the noise of cars,
steady even in this small city.
I am disturbed
and unhappy and afraid.
Beside the pronounced
direction of others
my desires seem vague.
Those I love
pull back from me, wary and cold.
One day follows the next,
and I am haunted by the words
of a Greek poet—
"As you have destroyed your life here
in this little corner,
you have ruined it in the entire world."

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KATE JENNINGS

Poem for the Broken Cup

for David and Anne

The way I winced as my elbow hit it,
then even before it hit the floor
the frenzy of weeping, astonishing

the children, who stared in stunned
silence for fully five seconds before
the baby wailed in fear and David

joined in sympathy while I dried my
eyes and tried to explain to him, to
ease the terror my tears had caused:

not the cup, I said, though the cup
was lovely, white mellowed these nine
years to cream, with its Potter

pictures of Peter Rabbit, and the
sweet frieze of green leaves on the
handle: not the cup, but it was

yours, I bought it for you four years
before you were born, just at the very
beginning, just when we were starting

to recognize that getting you was going
to take more work than simply making
love: and all those barren years

in Queens, I used to drink my morning
coffee from that cup as though that cup
were magic, as though it could change

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things—And I started to cry again,
closing my eyes against his frightened
uncomprehending face: the scalding

realization that even though I have them
now, those two, the scars of those years
are still with me and always will be:

and standing in spilled milk and shards
of china, crying and not even trying to stop,
scaring my children, I cried My cup! The cup!

Fall

Jura

A dull distant booming in the mountains this
morning: constant, and there can't be all
that many rabbits and deer and boar and what
else? Quail? What's being hunted up there?

I picture quail and rabbits falling, bucks
staggering to their knees, does kneeling,
the thick sponge of brown leaves, mosses

and pine needles, mulch, the litter and
clatter of walnuts and chestnuts, and the
stalking and steady reloading: new shot.

The guns echo all morning in the valley:
fits, and starts. Down here the butchers'
windows are displaying trays of feathered
birds, their plumage more vivid and varied

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than I'd imagined brown could be: a color
wheel of brown, a whole spectrum of brown.
Gamey forage to be filled with herbs and
mushrooms, maybe plunder from the rings

of wild mushrooms, innocent and sinister,
that poke their white caps up, bloodless
and surprised, in the high forest, just

begging to be plucked. The birds, herb
scented, mushroom stuffed, baked brown,
are probably delicious: but all this

morning, listening to that faint thunder,
I've been wondering what it's like there:
how wild is it up there? And just what do
they hunt, what are they hunting up there?

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DEREK MAHON

How to Live

Horace, *Odes*, Book One, 11.

Don't waste your time, Leuconoé, living in fear and hope
of the imprevisible future; forget the horoscope.
Accept whatever happens. Whether the gods allow
us fifty winters more or drop us at this one now
which flings the high Tyrrhenian waves on the stone piers,
decant your wine: the days are more fun than the years
which pass us by while we discuss them. Act with zest
one day at a time, and never mind the rest.

A Lighthouse in Maine

It might be anywhere,
That ivory tower
Approached by a dirt road.

Bleached stone against
Bleached sky, it faces
Every way with an air

Of squat omniscience—
A polished Buddha
Hard and bright beyond

Vegetable encroachment.
The north light
That strikes its frame

Houses is not

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The light of heaven
But of this world;

Nor is its task
To throw a punctual
Glow in the dark

To liners wild
With rock music and calm
With navigation.

Though built to shed
Light, it prefers
To shelter it, as now

In the one-bird hour
Of afternoon, a milky glare
Consuming the telephone poles.

It works both ways,
Of course, light
Being, like love and the cold,

Something that you
Can give and keep
At the same time.

Night and day it sits
Above the ocean like
A kindly eye, keeping

And giving the rainbow
Of its many colours,
Each of them white.

It might be anywhere—
Hokkaido, Normandy, Maine;
But it is in Maine.

You make a right

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Somewhere beyond Rockland,
A left, a right,

You turn a corner and
There it is, shining
In modest glory like

The soul of Adonais.
Out you get and walk
The rest of the way.

RUTH FAINLIGHT

Observations of the Tower Block

During the day, the building becomes a gigantic machine
collecting data from the whole district. At night,
a Cunard liner with every cabin occupied,
rigging decorated for the final gala.

Different patterns of lights. No matter how late I go
to bed or early I wake, there are always lights burning.
Nights of insomnia, when I look out the window,
someone else in the building is also not sleeping.

The lights glow pink and yellow, green and orange.
Is it from coloured bulbs, or filtered through curtains?
Who are the people who live in those apartments?

Illuminated lift-shafts, halls, and balconies.
The grid of the structure determines these lives,
  but my sightings
are too irregular to grasp their pattern or meaning.

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SYDNEY LEA

Trajectory

for M. R. B.

Implausible flight, flotation
of a Dodge Ram pickup truck above
the Interstate, Montreal-bound.
How could it be? Slow, revolutionary,
drifting just above
blown snow, below the stars
dipping with winter near road level. In such suspense,
which surely lasts
no longer than a second, life
rewinds.
Yet we aren't there, my love.
"Not there," we tell ourselves,
each in his silent voice, or hers. Not poised
in aching distance, far from what just passed,
just yesterday
—the dances and initial kisses
light as flakes at zero—
and nearer to
what transpires at last.
No, not. We are
preserved from ending, although it's late
to urge some caution
on the driver, fool who dreamed himself
immune from nature's mocking of our transit.
The road's slick grin turned mean
and spit between its teeth and tossed him,
truck and all, into mild trajectory
till he landed. Flight itself was lovely:
the steel cab caught the pure description
of planets on its panels as they circuited
before our very eyes. The crash was dull

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and disappointing, although we're not
mere gawkers anxious for titillation.
Did we stop for help? Or did we
dream those figures
dead in noncommittal repose?
Let disaster come. Let it, though, arrive
with dramatic flare and impact,
we say, wishing them in fact
upon ourselves, hours later,
sidereal time set back in motion, our cheap hotel
bed crackling like a frozen rut
and each locked up in his
or her compartment of mute desire
transcending flesh.
Man and woman in a cab, they sped
together north, as we have. We imagine
them like us, but with greater lust—
minds trained on the coming
white explosion
of the city above the tedious plateau
of upper Vermont, Gallic palaver,
adolescent bodily thrill. Their end was more
and less. We wonder,
did words pass between them, cruising
above ironic ground? Did words
pass between *us* in that arrested moment?
Neither one remembers,
but what might we have spoken? Peculiar oaths
we cry out as in its soaring sex
peaks before
the hurtling back to earth?
Strange callings on a Savior,
as if that spirit could protract
the trip we started so far back
in bodies that were so light
that innocence occurs to us
—here, later—
almost as disembodiment
and life back then as endless flight.

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PHILIP BOOTH

Procession

A white-throat flicked into the sunset window.
How small a thing to bury: his short neck limp,
eye perfectly blank, the feathers warm in my hand.

Nothing left now to whistle *Old Sam Peabody,*
Peabody, Peabody . . . The rest in their thickets,
knowing to go. The winter stars coming. Out early

this morning I see Orion, the first time this fall,
Aldebaran brilliant in Taurus, the Dipper's
handle tipped down toward daybreak. As sun-up

dims Venus, I walk the first frost out into ground fog,
as it happens. Slowly, it comes to me: today
would be father's 85th birthday. I hear

today's birds in the cedars, woken, knowing to go.
I think of a boy years beyond me, back in Council Bluffs,
a boy with father's name, out on a third-floor porch

after midnight, without knowing why, watching (he must
have told me hundreds of times) against his own horizon
these same winter stars beginning to show.

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A Two Inch Wave

The sea, flat
on a coming tide:
a two inch wave
climbs the low sand,
drags, curls,
and topples.
Over and over,
the water toppling
gathers and
gains on itself.
It tempts us,
whoever it is
we think we are,
to humanize
comparisons
—but that belongs
to another
century's nonsense.
Only the semi-
palmated plovers,
feeding in mid-
migration, two
strong, claim
the advancing edge
as their own:
they dip quick beaks
at something
we cannot pretend
to see;
inshore of ducks
floating calm,
off-tide of oaks
growing tall,
between the field
of a field
and the field of the

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incoming sea,
they dip quick beaks
into a margin
we cannot fathom;
they strike for
a sustenance only
they know. We
only partially
guess. The planet,
maybe
the cosmos,
they share with us,
or we share
with them, is a mystery
not to be solved;
what is here, now,
is *here*, *now*,
beyond every knowledge
except our caring:
fetched from behind
the old sun,
in the huge blue over us still,
Arcturus and all
her proximate stars
are already bound
to brighten and seem
to rise, as they
even now tip to ebb,
angled into the sea
on their own inviolate wavelength.

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VERNON YOUNG

Film Chronicle: Some Day in Tahiti

SOMEONE MUST HAVE SAID IT before Diderot. "Behind the noblest of our enterprises there is always a hint of penis." Truffaut seems to have echoed him when, on the subject of *The Woman Next Door*, he airily confided to an interviewer, "There is more truth in sentimental relations than in social relations. There is more truth in the bedroom than in the office or the board room."[1] He could have as easily remarked that there is as *little* truth in the bedroom as in the board room. If by truth he meant the decisive factor in an encounter or in a lifetime, he would have to agree that an obsession with business (or warfare, or art) can as fatally stifle the truth of the bedroom; choose your illustration. His latest film *happens* to be about the destruction of civil relationships by uncontrollable sexuality. In an upper-bourgeoisie suburb, Clotilde (Fanny Ardant) and her recently acquired husband (Henri Garcin) move next door to Bernard (Gerard Depardieu), married and a father, with whom she had had an inconclusive, harrowing affair eight years before. Bernard's wife and Clotilde's husband are kept unaware of the previous relationship as the combatants, you might say, ungird their loins for renewed battle. He, a kind of ox in the drawing-room, wants her *now* (yesterday he didn't know she was still on earth!); *she* wants *him*; she doesn't; she half-does; he refuses her, and succumbs; now she retreats and he persists; she goes mad with indecision, he stands off again, then explodes!—and it's all out in the open. She goes away with her Phillippe, a sterling character who manages affront with thankless dignity. Bernard mumbles contritely to his wife. Clotilde and husband return to close the house and move elsewhere. Seemingly recovered, she can't leave Bernard untouched; nor can he, her; one more time they embrace—and they've had it.

Attractive people caught in the ecstatic, grimy fact, one of the oldest and most reliable of our dooms. British and French filmmakers handle the subject best, as a rule, because their societies, while suffering the general attrition, do remain ceremonious; the tension between the social web and the anarchy of instinct that destroys its filaments accounts for the repetitive fascination of the familiar scenario. Like the best French films of this order (among recent ones I think of Michel Lang's *Memory of Claire*, Sautet's *A Simple Story* and Resnais's *Mon Oncle d'Amérique*—all more vivacious than Truffaut's) the *contingencies* are authentic. People have occupations

[1] "Truffaut and the Enigmatic Woman." Interview with Richard Eder. *The New York Times*. October 11, 1981.

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which are specified; here, they help to clothe the ironies. Clotilde illustrates children's stories; her husband is a plane dispatcher; Bernard, an instructor of boat pilots: outwardly directed professions vitiated by concupiscence, master of the house. It's a cool film (happily free of voyeuristic particulars). It might have been warmer if the women's roles had been reversed, if Michele Baumgartner had played the woman next door. Fanny Ardant, handsome and dry, was a good foil to Depardieu's neurotic mastiff, yet she struck me as insufficiently provocative in the hell that ensues.

People in their peopleness: unstable, envious, ignorant and lonely; sometimes for an hour beautiful. They sustain a movie when other considerations overreach, as in Krzysztof Zanussi's *Contract*. First exhibited while the Polish crisis after December 13th last was raging, the film, despite the sophistication of its concepts, seemed uncomfortably out of joint: a climacteric-of-the-bourgeoisie parable when the life of the nation was at stake. The Party as the End of the World has honorable antecedents, as far back at least as Renoir's *The Rules of the Game* and included notoriously in films by Fellini, Antonioni, Buñuel and Wajda. The successive episodes of *Contract* pass within two days of mid-winter deep in Warsaw snow, centered on a wedding which doesn't take place because Lilka flees the altar and is thereafter only an intermittent guest at the reception held in her honor and in that of her frustrated groom, Piotr, son of the host, Adam, by another wife.

At the party are the usual other-people: women covering up for their men; men who can't make up their minds about their women; erring daughters, self-dramatizing sons; people jockeying for positions; the established, being jockeyed; generations so far apart they could be from alien cultures. Everyone threatens to come apart at the zipper; some do. Following the more crucial solecisms, Adam and Dorota (host and hostess), cheerfully insist that it's nothing, "*Everything's going to be all right!*" They repeat the counsel desperately when, before it's all over, Piotr tries to burn the house down and Adam saves him from jail by his authority as a doctor. Alone with Adam after the guests have gone, Dorota admits, "It has been a terrible evening!" "It has been a terrible *life*," Adam groans, and adds shakenly, "I'm afraid, Dorota, I'm afraid!"—a premonition closer in style to Chekhov than Fellini and it reminds us that most European film-makers have lately renounced such editorial sententiousness. Polish moviemakers rarely create a film that isn't in quotes. (Wajda is the worst offender.) . . . *Personalities* save Zanussi's *Contract*; this means the actors; foremost, the actresses: Magda Jaroszowa as Lilka, skeptical and raffish, hugging herself against the cold, chewing her lip, disbelieving in advance everyone she meets; Maja Komorowska as Dorota who has assumed a Mona Lisa inscrutability to deny public disorder as she has for years concealed the deceptions of her Adam; above all, as Penelope, an ex-ballet star on visit from Paris, seemingly a self-sufficient snob while harboring a pitiful com-

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pulsion she can't cure, Leslie Caron, with magisterial and enticing charm, dominates every scene she enters.

Markus Imhoof, the German-Swiss director of *The Boat Is Full*, his first feature-film, I believe, shows the Poles, or anyone, how to do it: how to reconstitute a human outrage with what E. M. Cioran has called "tragic modesty"; that is to say, without trying to wring from his chronicle more pity than it was endowed with by history, more heroism or more villainy than his research of the particular case uncovered.

In the summer of 1942, when the Swiss authorities were severely reducing the number of refugees admitted (the number had never been copious), there arrived at an inn just inside the border Judith Kruger, hoping to join her husband (already a Swiss internee); her young brother, Olof; an old ailing man and his granddaughter; an abandoned French boy; and Schneider, a deserter from the army of the Reich. They throw themselves on the mercy of the innkeeper and his wife; with their, at first begrudging, assistance, they reconstruct themselves as a single family while awaiting permission for legal entry from the border *polizei*, in the gross person of Bigler. Bit by bit, under the blunt pressure of Bigler's questioning, their naive edifice of deception collapses and they are ordered to return to Germany. Franz, the innkeeper, who had at first been fearful of the refugees' presence against the entreaties of his wife, now attempts, with motorcycle and sidecar, a desperate last-hour rescue. The sequel keeps taking place in the pit of my stomach. Against the faint light of sunrise, the helmeted Swiss cavalry looms out of the dark to surround the luckless survivors.

Workers sealing off a railroad tunnel to the outside world open this film; it ends with all of the refugees except the French boy trailing back across a bridge into Germany—in a morning drizzle. What I think of as the canton personality in Switzerland has never been so unsparingly acknowledged, without damning or excusing: the neutral mind which may accomodate you today and for no deducible reason expel you tomorrow. Bigler is not pure evil, he's a *dumbkopf* with a tumescent ego; he *serves* evil, for he has no imagination; even as you wait for a boor to be a man, not a swine, he sends you to your death because death he can't visualize. This movie is an appalling experience, reconceived by Imhoof with scrupulous comprehension of how life can hang by a hair, and acted by everyone with self-effacing art that permits no shadow of disbelief. Markus Imhoof was, to my conviction, the most encouraging intelligence to arrive in the cinema world of 1981.[2]

The reddest thing about *Reds* is the herring. For two-thirds of its length I enjoyed it, so long as I didn't labor to identify the actors

[2] All the more incomprehensible was the choice by the New York Film Critics' Circle of a Brazilian film, *Pixote*, obscene and violent, a fifth-rate imitation of Buñuel's *Los Olvidados*, as "the best import of 1981"!

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with the political bohemians they were alleged to be representing. I have a feeling that John Reed was not as cute as Warren Beatty, that Emma Goldman was not as ladylike as Maureen Stapleton, that Eugene O'Neill's discourse was not as suave as that bestowed on Jack Nicholson and that Louise Bryant in no way resembled Diane Keaton. All the same, these actors were *somebody plausible* (until the Russian sequences, I mean!). What I was enjoying was a sex comedy, with some very astute lines, much expert editing (for example, the rapid montage of abridged letters to indicate time lapse), a fair approximation of the opulence (and the dim lighting) of New York salons in the twenties and a plausible staging of labor union contests. *Bonnie and Clyde Go Left* was an alternative title. John loves Louise, but the labor movement more; she's mad about him but on feminist principles won't climb down and just cuddle. (Their quarrel scenes were as good as Bergman's.) The real John Reed never stands up. We learn nothing about him which might have been useful to know: the origins of his quixotic interest in the masses; the euphoria of his misguided belief that the destiny of the American worker was bound up with the destiny of the Russian peasant. Once the story gets overseas, belief is wholly violated. First off, you *can't* film Soviet Russia; you have to photograph Finland, then shop for Polish actors! Beyond that, I should not expect a competent American film actor turned director to have a firm grasp of the apocalypse he is professing to dramatize.

There is no suggestion in this film that the momentous shifts in the Russian Revolutions were more than shifts from an idealistic revolt to the puerilities of a bureaucracy. The Byzantine power games, in all their ruthlessness, were never confronted; there was no hint of the frozen chaos of Russian cities in the post-revolutionary winters; not a single shot that summarized the heart-breaking horizontality of the land as convincing, even, as some in *Dr. Zhivago*. As for Louise Bryant stowing away to reach Norway and hitchhiking, evidently, across the Baltic wastes to be at her hero's death bed—it should only happen to me! The disillusioned American radical (*was* Reed disillusioned?) is not in any case my favorite character. I've known too many, invariably sentimental and calculatedly misinformed. But I repeat, the early sequences were fun. And Diane Keaton is surely the best actress on the American screen; she has more nuances at her command than any director knows what to do with. Consequently, she always seems to be in some other film! And I did take away with me two hilarious lines: one delivered proudly by a woman, a hundred years old, in the prologue sequence, with an impenitently American voice, "It's not everyone who can be buried in the Kremlin!"; the other by O'Neill (Nicholson), rebuking Louise Bryant for roaming aimlessly around the stage: "You're supposed to be looking for your soul, not for an ashtray!"

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Competitive sport is so naturally an ally of the motion picture that it's a wonder no work of art has been made of it since Leni Riefensthal's *Olympia, 1936*. The be-all and goal of *Chariots of Fire* is the Olympic Games of 1924 (Paris) in which a British team won the major track event, and the preparatory training for this event is what gives zest to a film in which the diffuse poetry tends to divert one from the prose of the matter. Recreating as it goes, with embarrassing accuracy (more thoroughgoing than in *Reds*), the sartorial and idiomatic horrors of the early twenties, the story line follows the single-minded biographies of two track stars, one from Oxford, one from Edinburgh, competing with each other, later enforcing one another to win the day for England. Abrahams was inspired by revenge for anti-Semitism (real or imagined); Eric Gill, a Scots keeper-of-the-Sabbath, by missionary devotion. On my second visit to the film I realized that much of the elation is worked up by the musical score and with of course the kinetics of the athletic art, very convincingly duplicated by the actors, especially by Ian Charleson as Gill—the radiant smile, the maverick form: face to the heavens and the arms flaying wildly! This time around I found the anti-priggishness in itself priggish, noted that Abrahams' girl, Sybil, with virtually two scenes, is a radically different creature in each, that the contentiousness of Eric's sister is too easily disposed of and that Hugh Hudson and Colin Welland (direction and script), although they attain an enviable fluency with their techniques—the use of slow motion and advance overlap, the recurring runners through the surf, oblique light on miles of sand, clusters of umbrellas and wet-peeling posters, the cross-cuts from Gilbert and Sullivan to the sprinting Abrahams, grimly *not* "an *English* man!"—were as inept as most directors at ending their film, which should have stopped dead after the inevitably designed moment, the winning of the race!

How much "reality" you can tolerate in movie characters whom you are incapable of admiring is not measurable. The unchecked idealism of *Chariots of Fire* does embody the attractive proposition that a man is more than what you see him *do*. That the characters in *Heartland* (directed by Richard Pearce) are as *authentic* as those in *The Boat Is Full* or in *Chariots of Fire* can only be admissible if you are satisfied with people who are no more than the sum of their chores! Pearce's film appeals to those who lag behind with the notion that truth is beauty, beauty truth. (*No*, I scream with Nietszche! beauty is to *save* us from the truth!) Wyoming, 1910. A charmless widow, with her even more charmless seven-year-old, endures life as a ranch-hand in order to buy a homestead. Since it is patently impossible for her to survive independently, she marries the dour Scot for whom she works and the film resumes with their first winter together and the coming of a hopeless spring. Their stock is depleted, their credit runs out, the hired hand leaves for Mexico, their newborn baby dies (of charmlessness), their horses become skin and

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bone, then bone. Actually, the greatest suspense lies in whether Stewart (Rip Torn) is going to answer with two words or eight—or by tamping his pipe. I appreciate meaningful silences if we are watching something known to the trade as mute eloquence. Rip Torn comes close to it but Conchita Farrell is as inexpressive as any female I've had to look at through a long night on the frontier. All the characters together have fewer words among them than *pithecanthropus erectus.*

I can't altogether write off Mr. Pearce's spartan enterprise; his supportive details are the real thing: the roping and branding of calves, the butchering of pigs, the kid's lessons in horse-handling—and the unceremonious wedding, fiddles and harmonicas and a giant cake and nary a word of acquired language. We *have* been through the like before: lyrically and on a grander scale in Jan Troell's *Unto a Good Land.* If I've ever said that treatment was more important than subject I hope I never insisted that subject matter was of *no* importance. When you settle for a winter's tale, uncompromisingly bleak, bleakness is what you will elicit from the spectator. Richard Pearce has integrity. Integrity is not enough. At the movies I want cakes and ale.

Gin and bitters were the ingredients of *Cutter's Way,* edgy with hatred and with a trashed-up conclusion, yet substantially worth seeing for its incisive direction (by Ivan Passer) and its sympathetic performances. The rich *can* get away with murder: this is the premise of the scenario (adapted from a novel by Newton Thornburg) and why should I argue? But the evil mainly depicted is on the side of the avengers. Beautiful and mindless, Santa Barbara is the place: rodeo parades, drum majorettes, patio architecture, utopian tans. Cord, a millionaire whom we rarely sight, is believed by Cutter (John Heard) to have rape-murdered a girl found in a blue-green alley just before a torrential rain (the photography is plush!). A paranoid crusader, with an eye-patch and half a leg missing (Vietnam), Cutter, a master of profane and extremely resourceful rancor, is intent on imposing violence, of which he's a star victim, on everyone else, not excluding his wife, Mo. Together with the dead girl's sister and a lay-about friend, Bone (played with exasperated forbearance by Lloyd Bridges), he plots to blackmail Cord before confronting him with the evidence and the police. Cutter's wife will have none of it and persuades Bone to pull out of a demented and immoral undertaking, but not before she, by accident in place of Cutter, is murdered. (Or did she commit suicide? This is never in fact established!) Which should have been the conclusively frustrating issue: that Cord is too smart for the conspirators and that Mo, impeding them in the name of virtue, leaves them profitless while the wicked flourish.

Someone didn't want it that way; they preferred self-liquidating heroism in the manner of Nathaniel West. Cutter rides a white

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horse through Cord's window at a reception and Bone shoots Cord with Cutter's gun, presumably afflicted by guilt for having broken the alliance of the unholy three. Up to this Elizabethan hour of corpses, one takes the film seriously, a tribute to Passer and to his actors. Thanks to them, the emotional validities are more trenchant than the plot line that gives rise to them. Lisa Eichorn is totally in it as Cutter's despairing wife who gets up sleepless in the night, looks in the mirror and wonders if she's real. Heard, himself, must be the best young American actor on file these days. When allowed to speak other than obscenities he speaks with a wealth of sardonic shadings. I shall long treasure a line he delivers with such sandpapered finesse that it sounded thematic far beyond its pertinence for the moment: "Some day in Tahiti we'll look back on all this and laugh!"

Notes on Contributors

RICHARD HOFFMAN* teaches English and Theater at a boarding school in New Jersey.

JAYANTA MAHAPATRA* won the 1981 Award from India's National Academy of Letters for his long poem, *Relationship*, published in the U.S. by Greenfield Review Press. He lives in Orissa, India, and edits the literary magazine, *Chandrabhāgā*.

An article by DANA GIOIA on books of poetry published by small and fine presses will appear in an early issue of this Review.

ANDREW HUDGINS is a Teaching-Writing Fellow at the Writers' Workshop of the University of Iowa.

WILLIAM HATHAWAY* teaches at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. His latest poetry collection, *The Gymnast of Inertia*, is now available from Louisiana State University Press.

JOYCE CAROL OATES's most recent books are *Invisible Woman: New and Selected Poems 1970–1982* (Ontario Review Press) and *A Bloodsmoor Romance* (Dutton). She teaches at Princeton.

ELIZABETH KNIES's second collection of poems, *Streets After Rain*, was published by Alice James Books in 1980. She lives in Portsmouth, N.H.

KATE JENNINGS* lives in Geneva, Switzerland, with her husband and two children. Her poetry has appeared in a number of anthologies and magazines.

DEREK MAHON's* new collection of poems, *The Hunt by Night*, will be published in the U.S. this year by Wake Forest University Press. Mr. Mahon lives in London.

RUTH FAINLIGHT's most recent book of poetry, *Sibyls and Others*, was published in England by Hutchinson in 1980. She is currently at work on a new collection.

SYDNEY LEA's second book of poetry is forthcoming from the University of Illinois Press. Mr. Lea is editor of *New England Review*.

PHILIP BOOTH, a widely published poet, teaches English at Syracuse University.

GILBERTO PEREZ has been awarded a Mellon Faculty Fellowship in the Humanities at Harvard for the coming academic year. He will be completing a book of essays on film, of which the article in this issue will be a chapter.

DEAN FLOWER teaches modern fiction and American literature at Smith College.

A translation by ALFRED CORN of the first act of Corneille's *Le Cid* is forthcoming in this Review.

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GILBERTO PEREZ

Between Life and Art

PHOTOGRAPHY IS A HYBRID of life and art. It takes its images directly from life, through the action of light on certain chemicals; it applies to those images a pictorial format—the rectangular frame, the system of linear perspective—which it inherits from the tradition of Western art. A photograph is in some ways like a seismographic chart and in other ways like a painting. Set it beside the chart, and it will seem notable for its pictorial values; set it beside the painting, and its distinctive quality will lie in its closeness to reality, in its having captured an imprint of actual appearances.

Ever since the time it was invented, photography hasn't lacked people interested in it primarily as a pictorial medium; it has found its main employment, however, in its recording capacity, as a mechanical eyewitness to the world's scenes. From Muybridge's pictures of trotting horses to astronautical close-up views of celestial bodies, from family albums to passport photos to news photographs, the medium has served as a receiver and repository of the look of things. For the purposes of the photograph as eyewitness, it doesn't matter what the picture itself looks like, only what it transmits about the appearance of its subject: pictorial values are irrelevant except as they contribute to factual information, to the fidelity of the visual testimony; and if the photographer is too preoccupied with those values they can get in the way. Advocates of photography as art have for the most part not denied that much of its effect derives from the immediacy of its connection with life; but they've stressed its pictorial rather than its factual qualities: what really matters to them isn't the subject depicted but the way it's been pictured. They like to point out that different photographers, before the same scene, will come up with different pictures of it, which is something they take as evidence of photography's powers of interpretation rather than mere mechanical reproduction.

Certainly it's naive to suppose that any photograph, however straightforward in its record of a scene, can exactly reproduce the way things looked in the world, since it shows them placed within a frame and transposed onto a flat surface. Even if wholly devoid of artistic aims, a photograph renders its subject through a pictorial transformation—which is why ordinary snapshots sometimes yield an interesting composition. But this hardly settles the argument, as old as the medium itself, over the artistic capabilities of photography. What needs to be decided is whether photography has the resources to transform its subjects sufficiently, and sufficiently in accordance with human intention, to produce the kind of interpre-

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tative rendering, the controlled arrangement of materials for expressive purposes, which art manifests. Detractors of photography as art have maintained, I think with justice, that even the most accomplished practitioners of the craft haven't done anything pictorially comparable to a good painting. The advocates, however, are especially insistent nowadays, when photographic prints command high prices in the art market—artificially high, I'd say, since, whatever one thinks of photography, its objects are in their nature not unique but readily duplicable—and the medium has been receiving increasing attention from critics and academics, galleries and museums. It seems we are to regard Stieglitz and Weston on a par with Titian and Goya; but the mere mention of these names side by side is enough to dispute the large claims being made for the artistic stature of photography. Still, there can be no doubt that many photographs have an effect that goes beyond their informational or recollective value; and certain ones evoke an unmistakable aesthetic response. But then certain sights in life also evoke such a response: a central issue raised by photography, and one as yet unresolved, is the extent to which the medium can be employed to do more, aesthetically, than just point to such sights and freeze them for our contemplation.

In his recent book on the nature of photography,[1] the last one he published before his death, Roland Barthes holds with those for whom, in a photograph, the subject is everything. A great and idiosyncratic critic, Barthes to me wasn't at his best in his semiological theorizing; I found a book like *Mythologies* admirable for the sharpness of its particular insights rather than for the generalizations tacked on at the end. Be that as it may, in his later work Barthes tended to make less use of the apparatus of semiology, and in *Camera Lucida* he drops it altogether because he considers photography a medium utterly dependent on the referent, on what it represents, the signifier fading in importance next to the qualities inherent in the things depicted. What chiefly interests him in a photograph is what he calls the *punctum*, the revealed and revealing aspect or detail which was there in the scene but which the photographer may not have even noticed when he took the picture and which breaks through its scheme to affect the spectator with the force of fact. Art is not, for Barthes, what photography deals in: he values in the medium precisely those points at which life asserts itself on its own terms, paying no attention to the photographer's calculations. In a Lewis Hine photograph of two idiot children at an institution in New Jersey, the intended effect was to bring into emphasis and set in contrast, by posing the children in profile beside each other, the shapes of their deformed heads; but what affects Barthes is instead "the off-center detail, the little boy's huge Danton collar, the girl's

[1] CAMERA LUCIDA: Reflections on Photography, by *Roland Barthes*. Trans. by *Richard Howard*. Hill and Wang. $10.95.

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finger bandage," the kind of thing which seems to have been picked up by Hine's camera of its own accord and which remains unassimilated into the terms of his pictorial arrangement. "It is often said," Barthes writes, "that it was the painters who invented Photography (by bequeathing it their framing, the Albertian perspective, and the optic of the *camera obscura*). I say: no, it was the chemists." For it was the chemists who "made it possible to recover and print directly the luminous rays emitted by a variously lighted object. The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here . . ."

The chemical discovery that made photography possible—the sensitivity to light of certain silver compounds—took place, however, a hundred years before photography came to be invented. All that was needed was to combine that discovery with the painters' *camera obscura*—a "dark room" into which light issuing from a scene outside flows through a pinhole or lens in one wall and forms an image of the scene on the opposite wall—a device which had been in use since the Renaissance as an aid to drawing in proper perspective. And yet nobody thought of the combination until, around 1830, Daguerre and Talbot and others arrived at it independently, as if following some dictate that was in the air. That this took so long to be done, and then was done by several people at the same time, is a curious fact which Peter Galassi enlists in support of his thesis in "Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography," an exhibition of paintings and photographs which he organized last year at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.[2] Galassi stands at the opposite pole from Barthes; his exhibition and accompanying catalogue seek to make the strongest case yet that it was the painters who invented photography, to establish for the medium a sound pictorial pedigree. "The object here," he writes in his catalogue essay, "is to show that photography was not a bastard left by science on the doorstep of art, but a legitimate child of the Western pictorial tradition." The invention of photography came about when it did, he argues, because it responded to an aesthetic impulse which was burgeoning in painting, a new way of looking at things and representing them visually whose development can be discerned in many instances of pictorial art done from the late eighteenth century onward. Galassi's thesis, briefly put, is that there was, in painting before photography, an emerging mode of vision which prefigured the photographic mode and prepared the way for it.

Although the system of perspective built into the camera is the same, mathematically, as that devised in the *quattrocento*, in the four centuries between that time and the advent of photography the

[2] The exhibition was held from May 9–July 5, 1981. Catalogue: BEFORE PHOTOGRAPHY, by *Peter Galassi*. Published by The Museum of Modern Art. Distributed by the New York Graphic Society. $22.50; $12.50.

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manner in which painters applied this system underwent considerable variation, and in photography perspective serves aims significantly different from those of the *quattrocento*. The system posits a single point of observation—in a painting, a virtual point, and in a photograph, the actual one where the camera was put—and decrees that everything in the picture be represented as it appears from that one point. Restricting the view to a single angle of vision may seem like a limitation, but it was certainly not regarded as that in the Renaissance: to the painter then, it was a means of achieving greater vividness and verisimilitude without obscuring in the slightest the display of a scene in all its essential aspects. Galassi gives as an example a painting from the circle of Piero della Francesca, *An Ideal Townscape*, which "presents the ground plan of the architecture almost as clearly as a map," while conveying, as a map would not, a sense of solidity and depth, of the buildings and the piazza in the ideal town as if they were being observed in reality. The view in a Renaissance painting is at once a particular and a commanding one: the use of perspective suggests an individual's point of view but not that of anyone subject to the contingencies of ordinary vision: this is, rather, an imaginary individual perfectly placed to survey the scene. In contrast, the view in a photograph does feel limited, contingent, fragmentary, a snatching of only one aspect among the infinitude of appearances the world offers.

This feeling owes a good deal, of course, to our knowledge that the photograph was derived straight from life; but it also has much to do, as Galassi endeavors to demonstrate, with the "pictorial syntax" of the medium, with the different way in which it characteristically uses the frame and perspective handed down from the Renaissance. Whereas, for Barthes, the medium has no syntax—or if it has one, it is that of the boring "well-composed" picture—for Galassi it exhibits "a new and fundamentally modern pictorial syntax of immediate, synoptic perceptions and discontinuous, unexpected forms. It is the syntax of an art devoted to the singular and contingent rather than the universal and stable." In order to make his case, Galassi must show that, more than simply recording immediate perceptions, capturing the unexpected and the singular, photography is able to articulate them in the terms of a visual language of some kind. The argument he advances for such a photographic language relies mostly on his parallel with painting, in whose indisputably controlled arrangements he sees that same new syntax anticipating photography and continuing—as very likely it would have, he implies, even if photography hadn't been around to influence painting—to its fuller elaboration in the work of later painters such as Degas.

In the Italian Renaissance, perspective was, as Galassi says, a "tool of rational composition," a method of setting up a "measured stage" within which all the parts of the picture would be arranged to form a harmonious, self-contained whole. Arranged in two dimensions

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through the patterns of perspective as well as in the fictive three which it convincingly brings forth, the measured stage was both the picture plane and the three-dimensional space depicted on it. The evoked three dimensions were thought of as a construction on the given ground of the plane, as a space made up by the painter inside the bounds designated by the frame. "Not until much later," Galassi writes, "was this conception replaced—as the common, intuitive standard—by its opposite: the derivation of a frankly flat picture from a given three-dimensional world." The perspective system remained the same but the sense of its application became reversed: from building the plane into a world to turning the world into a picture. Initially conceived as a means of expanding the plane into the added dimension of imaginary depth, perspective in the nineteenth century came to be regarded, after a long evolution that led both to photography and to Degas, as a means of reducing the three dimensions of actuality to the flat surface of a picture. Similarly the frame, which had served to mark the perimeter of an enclosed domain, came to be seen as the four edges of a cropping, a selection taken from a visual field felt to extend indefinitely beyond the limits set by the rather arbitrary rectangle.

A Degas painting like *The Racing Field*, which Galassi discusses as an example of the new pictorial syntax, well illustrates its distinctive procedures: the asymmetrical composition, the abrupt cutting off of figures at the edges of the frame, the pointed obstruction from view of certain things in back by others in front, the sudden jumps the eye is forced to make between front and back—the "internally discontinuous view," in Galassi's phrase—as opposed to being led clearly and gradually into the depth along the measured lines of a Renaissance painting. This is a syntax of incompleteness, a calculated use of pictorial means to convey the impression of a fragment, rather than a comprehensive view, by insistently calling attention to the particularity of the chosen framing and angle of vision. Hence it also serves to convey a stronger sense of immediacy than is found in previous art: it suggests the view of an actual rather than an ideal observer, of someone faced with the scene amid the confusions and limitations of life.

These features have often been noted in the work of Degas and other Impressionist painters, but generally they've been attributed to the "disruptive influence of photography," as Galassi puts it, whereas he maintains that, on the contrary, they arose out of an evolving tradition of pictorial representation which resulted in photography itself. To back up this claim, he assembled, for the painting side of his exhibit, pictures anteceding photography which already manifest features of the new syntax. Some by little-known artists, others by famous ones such as Constable and Corot, these are all, however, landscape sketches, which perhaps weakens Galassi's demonstration, since they're not pictures their makers considered finished works. But they're unusually finished for sketches, all

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done in the weighty medium of oil (not a common practice in landscape sketching until the late eighteenth century), and some looking to us much better (one by Thomas Jones, for example, or another by Léon Cogniet) than their makers' official works. Galassi proposes, moreover, that in these private pictures the artists could express more freely their intuitive feeling for "authentic representation, unburdened by the responsibilities of public art."

In photography circles, Galassi's thesis has been thought to be "startlingly original" (I'm quoting a commentator in the *New York Times*) and has provoked extensive controversy. Why didn't he consider, some have asked, whether any of the painters in his show used a *camera obscura*, which would explain the photographic look of their pictures? That would explain the look technically, but not the choice to implement it, a choice painters have—unlike photographers, whose camera does that implementing for them—and a choice painters made, which is what Galassi rests his case on: on the intention, fulfilled in these paintings, to have things portrayed in a proto-photographic manner. A painter can take what he wants from the image in a *camera obscura* and alter or disregard what he doesn't want; if those in Galassi's show were taking more than had formerly been the practice, that would only go to confirm his point. And his central contention is that the rise of photography itself is not to be explained by purely technical considerations, but must likewise be understood as the fulfillment of an intention to have things portrayed in a certain manner. (Of course, if a photographer doesn't want pictures with a photographic look, all he can do is quit his craft, but that's an option nonetheless.) Although more thoroughly documented and put more cogently than ever before, the thesis of Galassi's exhibit and catalogue is not, in fact, so very original. To anyone familiar with the development of painting and with changing outlooks in the nineteenth century—not only in the visual arts but in Western culture generally—the case he argues should prove substantially convincing. It seems to me indisputable that photography wasn't some accident of nineteenth-century tinkering but an answer to the same kind of growing concern with the particular and contingent which prompted Stendhal to say, just at the time Daguerre and Talbot were busy with their invention, that "the truth is in details"—rather than in essences—especially since this concern found a distinct and increasingly eloquent expression in the representational modes of nineteenth-century painting. Even if one isn't convinced by Galassi's assemblage of pre-photographic landscape sketches, can one really believe that a major artist like Degas would change his whole way of working on account of some extraneous gimmick?

Art historians and philosophers continue to debate the question of linear perspective: is it a pictorial convention or a scientific system for accurately rendering on the plane the appearance of things in the world? In my opinion this debate—whose participants have

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included, in opposite camps, such personages as Erwin Panofsky and E. H. Gombrich—has dwelt excessively on the issue of whether perspective corresponds to our perception of reality. Although it departs from our perception in some important ways, surely perspective comes closer than any other pictorial system to representing actual appearances; this doesn't mean, however, that it is not a convention. A convention need not be wholly arbitrary; a soliloquy in the theatre, for example, is plainly a contrivance and it also bears resemblance to the way that someone in life might take us aside to confide his thoughts. In a similar fashion, I maintain, perspective is both a contrivance and a means of depicting a scene—not in all respects, of course, but in a good enough approximation—as it would look to an individual observer in reality. What's most deeply conventional about the system lies precisely in the positing of that single point of observation: any perspective picture asks its spectators to agree to look at the depicted things as an individual would see them. The reasons why we should agree, however, are not the same in a picture by Piero and in one by Degas or in a photograph; I can think of no better proof of the conventionality of perspective than the change it underwent—the change the *convention* underwent, not the system itself—from its inception in the *quattrocento* to the way it came to be employed in the nineteenth century. In the Renaissance, perspective expressed the outlook of a confident humanism: we accept the single point of view because the whole scene is vividly revealed to it, because we're made to feel that the world yields its meaning to an individual's gaze. In Degas or in photography, perspective carries conviction by declaring the partiality of our individual perceptions in our dealings with the complexity and multiplicity of actual experience.

This much Degas and photography have in common; but I think crucial differences must be noted, which is where I part company with Galassi's argument. To my mind he has succeeded in establishing that photography shared a common impulse with painting of the decades before and after the new medium came into existence; but through this he evidently aims to establish something more, i.e., a certification of photography as a form of pictorial art on equal footing with painting. I say: no, it was the chemists who made all the difference in defining the nature of what photography can do best, in endowing it with its most salient attributes. A painting by Degas or Monet, although composed in a manner that would have made no sense to Piero or Raphael, is still carefully, arrestingly composed, as Galassi admits, beyond the powers of any photographer. The Impressionist painters, while rendering the fragmentary and momentary feeling of immediate experience, also laid a renewed stress on the picture plane as the ground of representation. Ultimately Degas and Piero, like all good painters, were about the same thing, the construction of a picture on the plane; but photography really is about taking pictures from the world. Whereas in a photograph our awareness of the plane comes mainly from our

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knowledge that the actual scene wasn't flat, the Impressionists set up a forceful interplay—which was, in its acknowledgement of the medium, the beginning of modernist painting—between the plane and the referent, between their assertive application of paint and the scene represented. This was another way of declaring the artist's limitations as an individual, the fact that his picture gives us only his particular view of things, but at the same time it expressed a will to order, an order achieved in the face of multitudinous life through the artful composition, as if to imply that even what seems quite random and chaotic can be brought under human control. Photography, in its most distinctive effects, is a surrender to life's disarray.

Two pictures in Galassi's exhibit (both of which I like very much) offer striking examples of internal discontinuity, of the placing of a foreground object right next to something way in back without attending to what lies in between. One is a painting by Corot of the fountain of the French Academy in Rome, the other a photograph taken by an unknown person of the Bavarian army's triumphal entry into Munich after the Franco-Prussian War. In both cases the internal discontinuity calls attention to the partiality of a point of view, but in the photograph it does little else of pictorial significance, whereas in the painting Corot employs it to create a delicate composition, rhyming the foregound shape of the fountain's spout (echoed in the outline of the trees above) with the dome of St. Peter's and with another dome also far in the background. In the photograph the Bavarian army is so far in back as barely to be discernible next to an awning, billowing in the wind and looming large in front. Perhaps that awning (slightly blurred by the exposure time) was intended, as Galassi suggests, to be a flag-waving comment on the occasion; perhaps the photographer, as seems more likely, couldn't get any closer to his ostensible subject; perhaps the diminution of the Bavarian army was intended as a comment against the military. We have no way of knowing for sure. Thanks to the chemists, however, this indeterminacy works in favor of the photograph; for it adds to the sense of its being above all a fact that the awning was there, as a tree was there, irrelevantly taking up the foreground in another of the nineteenth-century photographs in Galassi's show, this one of a pontoon bridge used during the American Civil War. As things, the awning and the tree are curiously touching in the way they seem to insist on their own presence; as elements of a pictorial arrangement, they function chiefly to signal a limited point of view. Pictorially, the principal strength of photography lies in its ability to underscore the partial view: by holding it in place forever, by flatly juxtaposing foreground and background so that our eyes are unable to shift their focus from one to the other as they normally can in life, by framing certain things and leaving others irrevocably outside our grasp. Besides recording it, photography does transmute life into a visual language, but a language not very articulate except in signifying limitation.

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Reviews

DEAN FLOWER

Fiction Chronicle

JOHN CHEEVER ONCE SEEMED A MINOR PRACTITIONER of urban gothic ("The Enormous Radio," "Torch Song") but he grew into a chronicler of the upper-middle class in and around New York and Boston (the Wapshot novels and countless stories like "The Country Husband" and "The Swimmer") who ranged between satire of the *nouveau riche* and sympathy for the faded and alcoholic aristocracy. His finest work showed how in recent decades these two groups had merged. More recently (in *Bullet Park* and *Falconer*) Cheever has veered toward something like allegory or meditations on the human spirit; and his latest fiction, a carefully-shaped *nouvelle*, carries these impulses further.[1] Cheever's desire now seems to be to generalize instead of narrate. His persona, an elderly well-to-do businessman named Sears, meditates on the usual Cheever milieu, but it's made slightly strange by being set in the near future, a few decades from now when pollution is worse and interstate highways have four-digit numbers. There are two plots, both in a sense negligible: Sears falling in love, and Sears trying to save a pond from being turned into a dump. But Cheever has almost no interest in the details. He prefers labels instead: "The offices where she worked struck him as being characterized by a kind of netherness. They were on the nether floor of a nether building in a nether neighborhood, and when he entered the place he saw nothing that was not distinguished by its portability." In consequence we never really see any individual streets or buildings or families; they are all merely representative. The elusive Renée whom Sears loves—or perhaps merely desires—becomes Elusive Woman whose litany is "You don't understand the first thing about women." Sears deserves that rebuke often, but just as often Cheever has her say the words inscrutably. Other features of the story are even more patently unbelievable: a homosexual encounter, a visit to a psychoanalyst, two women brawling in a supermarket. In this last a woman becomes, we are told, "as overwhelmed and passionate as if she felt herself to be a figure in some ancient patriotic or religious contest," and a huge crowd gathers to "watch these women fighting over groceries and precedents." I wonder what title *The New Yorker* would give this excerpt—Supermarket

[1] OH WHAT A PARADISE IT SEEMS!, by *John Cheever*. Knopf. $10.00.

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Fights We Doubt Were Patriotic or Religious Contests? Cheever should have put Sears at some distance from his own narrative consciousness; the lack of it implies a fond endorsement: "He was constitutionally a traditional specimen with a traditional and at times benighted concept of a woman's role in the world, but [Renée's] unchallengeable good looks seemed, so far as he was concerned, to secure her place in the stream of things." But these benighted attitudes go unchallenged; they are part of the necessary sentimental equipment (it seems) that saves Beasly's Pond from pollution. In this nomadic and precarious society, Cheever seems to be saying, "traditional specimens" like Sears are the salt of the earth. Cheever even indulges his hero's impluse to categorize the souls of strangers:

> He judged faces, it seemed, on their capacity to contain light. It was lightlessness in a face—the absence even of the promise of light—that reminded him unhappily of man's inhumanity to man. It was not, of course, in his power or his disposition to judge the faces of strangers, but walking down the streets of any city in the world he sought in the faces of strangers the quality of light.

If only this were not so packaged and endorsed by the author and bestowed with blessings on the hero: mightn't he be mistaken about who really has the light? But Cheever disallows that.

Inseparably from its deficiencies as a novel, *Oh What a Paradise It Seems!* offers a series of meditations on the nature of American society and culture. These are usually elegiac in tone, frankly omniscient in mode, but at least free of sentimentality. They concern our need for illusion, our nomadic versus acquisitive impulses, and the relatedness of past and present. I liked the ones on skating, on music in supermarkets, and on fried foods. Sears skating over black ice thinks of his resemblance to figures in Breughel paintings and to the first primitive men who devised skates out of bird skulls thousands of years ago. Brandenburg Concerti heard in the Buy Brite store are not a tacky misuse of culture but a reminder that Bach might have been heard in German marketplaces centuries ago, wafting from nearby cathedrals. The heavy smells of fast-food restaurants on American roadsides evoke the vision of Carpathian shepherds eating fried foods in ancient days at harvest festivals and of eggplant fried at the Colosseum. Observations like these have become familiar Cheever themes, but he voices them here with a poignant finality: "What moved him was a sense of those worlds around us, our knowledge however imperfect of their nature, our sense of their possessing some grain of our past and of our lives to come." That is prayerful and perhaps for Cheever definitive. Let the reader fill in the rest.

Larry Woiwode has lavished all his craft and art on his third fic-

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tion, a more beautiful and blest *nouvelle* than Cheever's, but it's a disappointment as a story.[2] The central character fails to come alive, leaving nothing to fall back on since Woiwode keeps it all in his point of view. He is "Poppa John" (real name: Ned Daley), an actor nearing seventy, overweight and out of work, lately a television star whose face and gestures live on in the minds of millions—a Will Geer, perhaps, with admixtures of Falstaff and Papa Hemingway. Written out of the series nine months before, Poppa John spends the day of this novel mostly in the streets of New York, using up the remainder of his savings in Christmas shopping for his wife, Celia, and veering off into bars. The situation has its appeal—the mask that refuses to come off, the personality so dependent on role that it's helpless without one—but there is bathos in it too. Woiwode treats us to Poppa John's every despondency and hesitation, every wobble in the knees, rumble in the stomach, and panic in the bladder. Which might not be without interest, if it weren't for Woiwode's manner of lingering on these moments. The language is careful to a fault:

> The drink was gone. The last of it was going in a crawling sear down his esophagus, and then it struck his stomach with the breath-stopping burn of eating at the membrane over an ulcer.
>
> His bladder had to clang with demand for relief to get him to his feet, even, and that matter was disposed of with such dispatch it was as if dumb organs had dashed off to do their bothersome duty (nevertheless calling up grateful groans that they continued to work) and then were reunited with the sitting essence of him that had remained.

Cherished even more carefully are Poppa John's memories: of his boyhood in tenement basements, of his father reading aloud at bedtime, of Celia rescued from the clutches of her venal family, of his career's ups and downs. The effect is cloying; Woiwode superintends everything. Instead of simply going into Bloomingdale's, Poppa John "hurried inside, into a din confined." Note the elegant repetition and the internal rhymes. On the subway his hard breathing "sounded magnified, moving among echoing chambers in a draw of release and loss that kept coming up as pain under his ribs." Woiwode cannot allow Poppa John merely to look down at the subway floor; he must be seen "aiming his own [gaze] down at the floor (a splash of incontinence on its tracked and grayish tilt?), which a pressure behind his eyes mercifully blurred, narrowing him in on the vodka's numbing fumes." The evasive artiness of *incontinence* and *tilt*, the free-floating *mercifully*, the drag of too much allit-

[2] POPPA JOHN, by *Larry Woiwode*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $10.95.

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eration and rhyme (*ti, tr, ti*; *mer-blur*; *ing, him, in*; *numb-fume*) combine to spoil the intimacy we might wish to feel for Poppa John: either he's only faking his drunkenness or the fancy style sentimentalizes and condescends.

Poppa John's distinguishing feature in his television role was his knowledge of the Bible. The nebulous Ned that he was—roaring as Falstaff, vulnerable like Hemingway—finds something more sustaining, some echo from his father's and grandfather's voices, in the King James Bible, especially the Psalms and Proverbs. He brought to his Waltons-like television family a reassuring Biblical voice, and discovered (believably: he was approaching sixty then) his own need for Old Testament wisdom and guidance. In fact that's what got him the part and brought him twelve years of success with it. But when we are told that the Bible continues to shape Poppa John's life, that "his everyday order still revolved around its truth," we want to hear and feel that. We want to see him acting rather than hesitating, cringing and suffering, cutting loose *in speech* instead of just tormenting his ulcer with vodka, capable at least momentarily of pounding out some Jacobean rhetoric. All he seems able to utter, however, are genteel formalities: "It was favorable to me to be without lights," he tells his wife; even more solemnly he warns a girl who picks him up, "It's the sort of thing I don't do as a rule." Or he lies to a cab driver, "My daughter and I have had a little disagreement." Nowhere in Poppa John's language does Old Testament metaphor or syntax or feeling appear. Never do we hear him using the rhetoric Celia warns him against: "your fancy King James Elizabethan to justify what you're up to." If only he had voiced some of the splendid fraudulence he is supposed to have, if only he had at least echoes of Pumblechook or Uncle Maury Bascomb or W. C. Fields, he might have become the "big marionette" that Woiwode intended. Instead he's just a marionette.

So far as I know the novels of Peter De Vries are not mentioned by the Serious Critics of contemporary fiction nor by the scholar-squirrels either. Perhaps that's wise, or at least safe. But I read the latest one—his twentieth—with a certain awe.[3] It's another romp of course, careening along with characters named Daisy Dobbin and Dog Bokum and Effie Sniffen, making itself at home in suburban Terre Haute and Grand Rapids as well as the Big Apple. De Vries has about as much concern for verisimilitude as a *New Yorker* cartoon; but, when you think of it, that's in its own way considerable. For De Vries has become an undeniable master of a very special subject: how Americans use words and how the words use us. Each of his novels presents a fresh collection of current jargon, cant, slogans, bromides, clichés, euphemisms, puns, malapropisms, solecisms, buzz words, and faulty allusions. From the inexhaustible

[3] SAUCE FOR THE GOOSE, by *Peter De Vries*. Little, Brown. $11.95.

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world of advertising ("previously-owned cars" instead of "used") and product names ("Out Damn Spot!") to the ways people fantasize ("She would know men with names like Hilary, Chrétien, and Maurice") or talk about divorce ("paying alimony to two squaws"), De Vries keeps hearing America singing. In this novel he seizes upon the lingo of women's liberation, of consumer protection groups, and of people making love: the spiel of one Lothario is decorated with exclamations from T. S. Eliot and the love-talk of another is composed entirely of theology and history. He's the same one who refers to himself, a Dutchman, as "good matrimonial lumber" and to a jazz musician as "Big Spiderbeck." Everyone comes wrapped in his own peculiar verbal aura, from the uncle who writes "black" greeting-card jingles to the Indiana couple who are "brunch-prone" to Shrubsole the waggish Englishman who tries leaving a party in order to cut his lawn by saying, "But I have premises to keep." He is soundly defeated by his hostess who misses the gag completely:

> "I have premises to keep, you see. *Premises to keep,*" he repeated, pale with horror.
>
> "Of course, Tippy."
>
> "Premises to keep," he went doggedly on with a gulp, "and miles to mow before I sleep . . ." He clutched at his breast, as though a seizure might follow on the laying of this egg.

The serious fun in De Vries comes down to this: our words bamboozle us so often as to make us dizzy; our continued faith in them is not only hilarious but amazing; yet while they may betray, words also surprise and delight us, help us to escape anger, or dream harmlessly ("woolgathering" is a favorite De Vriesian motif), or awaken memories, or quicken our wits. The typical De Vries plot hinges on innumerable verbal confusions and adjustments, as in the character (several novels ago) who got himself into a writer's colony by saying he'd been "working on a novel" for several years and wanted to "finish" it, only it turned out he was *reading* it. Similarly, the typical De Vries sentence cascades from elegance to pratfall and from midwestern twang to learned literary allusion as easily as a water spaniel fetching sticks. The reward is in that play.

Tobias Wolff's short stories[4] depend so heavily on dialogue and limited points of view that they remind me of the early J. D. Salinger. Wolff has a fine ear for the clichés of hippie wisdom, the jargon of academic types, the formulas of parental criticism, and the evasions of the unhappily married. Children appear frequently in these stories, but the focus is more often on insecure and immature adults. The effect is less Salinger than, say, Raymond Carver, with

[4] IN THE GARDEN OF THE NORTH AMERICAN MARTYRS, by *Tobias Wolff.* The Ecco Press. $14.95.

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its special emphasis on passivity and sublimation. Several of the stories are a delight to read aloud, notably "Passengers," about a nervous young man who picks up a girl hitchhiking with guitar and large hairy dog, and "The Liar," about a boy who fends off the world by his compulsive and usually morbid lying. But the immediately engaging and winning manner of Wolff's colloquial technique is deceptive. These stories repeatedly turn on moments of cruelty, cowardice, and impure guilt.

"Hunters in the Snow" features the sadistic Kenny, who teases his fat friend Tub to the breaking point, gets himself shot in the stomach, and spends the rest of the story bounced around in the rear of a pickup truck on the way to a hospital they never reach. The third hunter is Frank, a typical Wolff character in that he fails to take any stand, siding with Kenny at first and getting drunk with Tub later, apparently because the confusions of his personal life (an affair with the babysitter) have made him covertly vengeful. "An Episode in the Life of Professor Brook" exposes the cruelty of a young English professor who cuts down a fellow scholar in a panel discussion and then indulges himself in an overnight romance with an ignorant young poetess. Wolff charts this progression from unconscious arrogance to uneasy guilt to self-pity and deception so believably that you wonder at the end why anyone ever thought the humanities made people humane. In the title story a woman who teaches history at a West Coast college is flown to an eastern university for a job interview, only to learn that the position isn't open and she must deliver a lecture (not her own) to complete the charade of a "nationwide search." Instead of the canned lecture, however, she improvises from her research in American history a hair-raising account of how the Iroquois tormented their captives with red-hot hatchets, pitch, and boiling water. We are left in no doubt about who in the lecture room are the Iroquois and who is the captive martyr; but the stinging justice of her tirade only intensifies her hopeless position. The recurring predicament of a Wolff character seems to be fear of the self: fear of sexual aggression, of betraying half-hearted loyalties, of asserting authority. Between cruelties and fears, Wolff doesn't leave us enough to choose. He has narrowed his vision so far as to suggest gratuitous cruelty, and that needs to be tempered.

"Illinois Short Fiction" began as a series about seven years ago, when the University of Illinois Press began publishing the work of young or previously-unsung short story writers. Gordon Weaver, Nancy Packer, John William Corrington, and Barry Targan (among others) have all done interesting work here. Of the four new collections published this year I found Peter Makuck's the most valuable.[5] He relies heavily on getting us inside a troubled consciousness: a

[5] BREAKING AND ENTERING, by *Peter Makuck.* University of Illinois Press. $11.95; $4.95.

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boy whose father is killed ("Assumption"), a young man whose rock music fantasy of himself is collapsing ("How It Fee-Yuls"), a husband whose home is defiled and threatened ("Breaking and Entering"). Most of these stories end with a sad recognition—of insecurity, dishonesty, anguished self-doubt, fear. But the sensibility that produces them is more generous. Makuck has pleasurable epiphanies for us if not for his characters. "The Enemy," for example, concerns a boy whose passion is flight: first birds, then gliders, eventually U-control models with glow-plug engines raced in clubs and competitions, and afterwards the real thing—jet fighter planes over Viet Nam. Unaggressive by nature, David is drawn into competition with an enemy of fearsome reputation, Nick Bellico, and he wins. Home from Viet Nam years later, David meets the no longer bellicose Nick who now pumps gas at the service station he owns. Although the two shake hands, David conceals his flying experience, unwilling to cause Nick any misguided envy and—at a deeper level—ashamed of the deadly power his boyhood ambition has given him. Makuck's precision in all this is firm: "At the farm he would sit on the porch swing and listen to the wood groan and watch the hawks riding thermals, hanging, teetering, slowly turning the sky, exploding, and reappearing out of the August sun." Or we have unobtrusive notations like "Rain pours out of the dark sky and beats the tar into silver." Or we find the gentlest of metaphoric touches, as when David's hand is "gritty and smeared with rust that thins and reddens but won't rub off on the handkerchief." Despite the grim unsentimentality of these fictions, their language transforms them. Makuck's is a talent worth watching.

That Flannery O'Connor's influence is abroad in the land was hinted last year in Ella Leffland's *Last Courtesies and Other Stories*, but Doris Betts's fourth novel shows it even more arrestingly.[6] Betts takes her O'Connor type—a sardonic spinster librarian from Greenway, North Carolina, glumly trapped into the duty of tending her invalid mother and retarded brother—and puts her through a long ordeal of escape. Abducted by a vicious ex-convict and taken out west, Nancy Finch almost loses her life in order to find it, and then must fight off the temptations to surrender what she has won. That she can and does win this selfhood, convincingly, makes it a lengthy and suspenseful novel. The only problem seems to be to preserve O'Connor-like bluntness and irony, and still have her character survive. Hard-headed but self-deceiving, Nancy has been persuaded to abandon her notion of a Caribbean cruise in order to go camping with her simple-minded sister and doltish brother-in-law. The Misfit appears in the form of a psychotic sadist named (perhaps) "Dwight Anderson." Fear of rape and murder impel Nancy to obey her captor, but so too does her half-acknowledged will to escape her tepid

[6] HEADING WEST, by *Doris Betts*. Knopf. $13.50.

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life and its dismal duties. At first she vacillates between terror, spurts of anger, and ironic detachment; none of it is real yet.

> She could picture the Finch family distraught at her funeral, wearing wreaths as if they were leis. Then she imagined the closed coffin as empty, her body never found. Because? Because Nancy did not get murdered at all, merely raped! Merely?

She thinks she could survive that and then conveniently disappear: "Take my sore crotch and go," she thinks. Betts makes us delight in Nancy's retaliatory grit (she takes every risk in order to insult and injure Dwight) even while we wonder at her sanity. Her self-irony in these early stages of her suffering is jaunty: "Others get amnesia under stress—why not me?" Because, in a way, she's having the time of her life. Along with her anger and fear and sheer revulsion at her captor, Nancy feels elation. As they head west in Dwight's stolen car, she has chances to call police but fritters them away calling home, calling the library, calling an old friend she has not seen in years. Her motives get further entangled when a disbarred judge latches on to them; he's equally ready to light out for the territory, but happens to be an abject coward whom she must try to help first before her own freedom can be gained. In the margins of this hectic story Betts manages some devastating snapshots of such American scenes as bingo night at the trailer park, the spoiled brat and his permissive dad (California-style), and the slovenly look of cars, tents, RVs, clotheslines, kids, and trash that defines Campgrounds, USA.

Gradually Nancy's predicament becomes more frightening, Dwight's suspended evil more ominous, her resourcefulness less. Her last illusions of outwitting her captor or "understanding" him fall away. The climactic scenes in the Grand Canyon carry us deep down below the superficial ways we perceive our landscape and accommodate ourselves to it, hiking athletically, taking ecological concerns, packing down the trail on mules, or riding the big rubber rafts. Betts is nicely matter-of-fact about these deeper strata:

> People are always crossing the Kaibab suspension bridge over the Colorado with a tired wild look on their faces. Nobody notices this normal response to too much space, light, rock, heat, insignificance, and thirst.

It is a landscape that certain people take very hard; its rhythms are different and its dry austerity awesome. Nancy meets a few others who have felt something of this, by living near the Canyon, and later they help her; but her personal salvation comes only when Nancy learns where she really is, her "true country" as O'Connor would put it. Betts renders all this through Nancy's punished senses so

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well that the long aftermath—recovering, sorting things out, going home, deciding what next—has an inevitable but nagging lethargy. Yet I find on re-reading that the novel's fast pace, a kinetic energy almost pulling you along two-thirds of the way, disguised its verbal subtlety. Early descriptions in fact had their clear portents: "Taking off her sandals [Nancy] braced both bare feet against the rock where her toes felt out the dents and crevices of the stone. She seemed to be locating them for her spring outward into space." Or this description of a document showing Dwight's "ownership" of land on the moon: "Dwight's acre was located in Sinus Aestuum south of Eratosthenes crater, the location pinpointed by degrees of longitude and latitude from a standard lunar map." Betts is an artist of the plain style, who finds her metaphors in the most unadorned information.

Aharon Appelfeld was born in Poland in 1932 into a liberal educated Jewish family, and his mother was shot by the Nazis eight years later. Put in a Ukrainian labor camp and separated from his father, he escaped a year later, wandered as a shepherd to conceal his identity, joined the Russian army, and eventually found asylum in a refugee camp near Palestine in 1947, where he began to learn Hebrew. He had just turned fourteen. What claims our attention now, with the translation into English of his second novel,[7] is not so much its reflection of the author's nightmare experience of growing up condemned and without a home, parents, or even a language he could call his own (although I think it helps to know these things). Nor is it really the persecution of the Jews that Appelfeld asks us to dwell upon (the story is kept scrupulously free of either propaganda or self-pity) although that persecution appears everywhere. What's compelling is Appelfeld's study of self-persecution: the horrible evasions and deceptions of individuals and families disintegrating under the struggle to "pass" for something they are not.

Thirteen-year-old Bruno describes these disintegrations with a dreamlike simplicity; to him they are ambiguously "wonders," and the whole novel remains under the spell of half-comprehending vision. In the first episode Bruno and his mother return from a summer retreat on a wearisome night train. It stops in the middle of nowhere and all non-Christians are asked to step out and be registered. One fat woman laughs maddeningly, "and there was a kind of crazy enjoyment in her voice, as if this were what she had been waiting for all her life." But her laughter isn't pointless or drunken as the boy thinks. The train is full of Jews who are baronesses and businessmen, diplomats and housewives, and the laughing woman's purpose is to tell them they cannot hide: "Come, children," she says, "Don't tell me that I'm the only Jew in all this honorable com-

[7] THE AGE OF WONDERS, by *Aharon Appelfeld.* Trans. by *Dalya Bilu.* David R. Godine. $12.95.

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pany." Bruno sees how strange the people look next to the coaches, "like little insects wrinkling the straw with their feet." One wishes there were more of such vivid imagery, but translation no doubt tends to blur and generalize the diction, and for the rest Appelfeld's technique demands a pervasively anonymous and dissociated atmosphere. We perceive Bruno's father not so much as a particularized writer and intellectual but as virtually a strange man whose identity crumbles under repeated accusations that he is "not Austrian" or as a universalized father-figure who takes the whole family to a great estate where an "old friend" will protect them—only to be turned away at the gate. Here again the scene is unforgettable: more wearisome train travel at night, an unidentifiable landscape, desolate little country stations, and a gate-keeper straight out of *The Castle*. Part One of the novel ends too luridly, perhaps, with all the Jews passing as non-Jews brought together in the synagogue where, in a grotesque reversal, they torture the rabbi: "hoarse voices tearing at the darkness like blunt saws." But Appelfeld remains on firm ground here: when he shows their hands shaking and their eyes unable to look at each other, it's clear which sort of torture is worse. Part Two presents the grown-up Bruno who returns to his village from Israel, tries to make contact with the few wretches who have successfully "passed" for good bourgeois Austrians (except perhaps in their own souls), and seeks some meaningful echo of his origins. He of course fails. Most of his time is spent passively, either drinking or watching the shadows. The scene seems to offer a bucolic simplicity, a post card of Austrian charm, but it is really de Chirico. Appelfeld is at his best with undramatic moments. When Bruno stops and calls out to an old Jewish acquaintance, very little happens:

> The man turned the upper part of his body slightly, fixed him with a stare, and said, 'You are mistaken, sir.' The stare fixed Bruno's face for a moment and then dropped. Bruno twisted his face into an apology, bowed, and turned away. He felt a biting cold in his fingers, as if stung by night frost.

All this has an inexorable logic, and makes us unwillingly stare. If this is "Holocaust fiction," as we see it labeled now in the book catalogues, Appelfeld has gone so far beyond his predecessors as to put many of them to shame.

Saul Bellow imposes all manner of difficulties upon himself in his latest novel, then manages like Houdini to wriggle free of them.[8] What other novelist could use such a withdrawn protagonist caught in a foreign country he knows little about who feeds almost exclusively on his own "whirling" thoughts? Perhaps only Henry James

[8] THE DEAN'S DECEMBER, by *Saul Bellow*. Harper & Row. $13.95.

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in his later fiction did as much with as little. Albert Corde, an academic dean at some large Chicago university, is a wintry-cold saint of composure next to Henderson or Herzog. What's more, at the time of the novel he's stuck in a strange room in Bucharest while his wife's mother lies dying, unreachable, in a state-controlled hospital. Corde can only take us back to his Chicago streets in remembered fragments—that's where the action was—while he's shunted aside by his wife and her relatives, preoccupied with their griefs, leaving him virtually a dangling man. At least Sammler was allowed to walk in the streets of his anarchic New York; Corde is only permitted to think about the words he used to describe Chicago streets in some lengthy articles he has published recently. Rather than present us with a consecutive "Chicago plot"—it would concern a murder trial Corde has become interested in, involving race, drugs, sex, and how his nephew and brother-in-law are for different reasons pitted against him—Bellow has chosen almost perversely to let Corde dwell self-indulgently on his reckless but wonderful Chicago articles. Here is how Corde confesses his sins:

> He was sorry now about that. He thought he had interrupted his accounts of County Jail, County Hospital and Robert Taylor Homes far too often with his unwanted and misplaced high-mindedness. On rereading, he himself passed quickly over the generalizing, philosophizing passages. They were irritating. He wouldn't, as a reader, have bothered to figure them out. Straight narrative was a relief and a consolation.

A clever disarming strategy, to say the least. Corde embarrassed by his writing (but not really) becomes Bellow apologizing (but not really) for his "high-mindedness," admitting that his novel is weighed down with "philosophizing" when it should have given "straight narrative." It's all designed to make the reader see virtue in tedious "high-mindedness" and to forget about that crude desire for plot. In Corde's terms we are to prefer "exaltation" (the humanities, the heart) to journalism (politics).

The most dramatic event to occur in Bucharest is Corde's meeting with an old boyhood friend, Dewey Spangler, who has become an internationally-known columnist of considerable power and influence. Once idealistic poetry-loving kids together in Chicago, Spangler and Corde have gone separate ways for decades, not just because their careers diverged. While Corde succeeded quickly in political journalism (he dropped it later for the academic world), Spangler muddled through years of psychoanalysis and, as Corde now learns, has continued to resent and envy him. Fat, shrewd, and still insecure despite his glittering success, Spangler is a type Bellow can do blindfolded: "Spangler tucked his laughter under his armpits, where his fingers were inserted, and crossed his smallish feet."

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Genial Corde fails really to perceive Dewey's sharp teeth, his "puffy," calculating eyes, his "doughnut fragrance, slightly stale," and the import of his persistent questioning. Dewey is yet another version of Allbee from *The Victim*: the insulted and injured rival who nurses a lifelong grudge. Unlike all other Bellow protagonists I can think of, however, Corde handles the betrayal when it comes with almost condescending ease. If Bellow meant his hero to be cut down either by Dewey or by his own admissions of confusion or by some deep-laid auctorial irony, he failed to convince me. Whatever the intention, Bellow has given us the portrait of a charming and interesting egotist, one whose admitted faults seem calculated to increase his appeal, one whose complacency is showing.

Yet for all that, Bellow's novel compels our attention. The onlie begetter of Herzog's ravings can still exert his magic. He gives Corde's thoughts such a palpable immediacy, such convincing shifts in tone, abruptnesses, and Big Ideas collapsing into humor or self-doubt, that sometimes one can only revel in Bellow's gifts. Years ago he observed that Yiddish conversation was "full of the grandest historical, mythological, and religious allusions," and he began in *Augie March* to loosen up his own style along these lines. "The creation [Bellow went on], the Fall, the Flood, Egypt, Alexandria, Titus, Napoleon, the Rothschilds, the sages, and the Laws may get into the discussion of an egg, a clothesline, or a pair of pants." Naturally, talk of this sort may devolve into monologue or lecturing, but the real question is whether it loses human authenticity. Here is the way Bellow handles a typical Albert Corde rumination:

> You see (Corde saw), you begin to lose contact with human beings and with the world. You experience spiritual loneliness. And of course there are the classics of this condition to study—or rather to mull over: Dostoevsky's apathy-with-intensity, and the rage for goodness so near to vileness and murderousness, and Nietzsche and the Existentialists, and all the rest of that. . . . Not quite sufficient to say that at this moment of history the philosophical problems are identical with the political ones. This is true. It's okay. Only it's insufficient. You had better go see in detail exactly what is happening.

The heady abstraction, the slapdash allusion, the dismissive categories, the wonderful self-correction ("or rather to mull over"), the self-admonition, the bull-headedness—everything in the passage dramatizes its substance, that Corde feels spiritually adrift, disengaged from the world, his mind racing. Bellow's deepest interest seems to lie in this predicament. Corde—Bellow too?—has only voices like Dewey Spangler's or his snarling nephew Mason's or his gentle sister Elfrida's to reconnect him with the world. I suspect that's what dictated the impacted form of the novel. Bellow, like his

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protagonist, can roam freely among "the grandest historical, mythological, and religious allusions," but he seems to know he has kicked free of the rest of us. I wish his next novel—make that a short story—would concern an egg, a clothesline, and a pair of pants.

Heinrich Böll, another Nobel Prize winner, has written an almost equally stationary novel, but it's entirely free of any debilitating self-absorption.[9] The impasse here arises from fears of political terrorism. The setting is a West Germany of the near future, where Fritz Tolm and his family are surrounded by a "safety net" of surveillance because he has become president of a gigantic industrial consortium, only a puppet figure but the more vulnerable for that. The subject itself conveys a typical Böll irony, since the figures of power here privately know they have invented the terror themselves. But Böll approaches his subject individually, through the mind of each major character. This makes for a staggering quantity of detail. There are no less than seventy names on the very useful "List of Characters" that prefaces the novel. But it also makes for something better: immediate access to the most private selves of each person. Thus Böll forestalls any categorical assumptions about who is dehumanized and who is not; his method makes even the worst characters human—all too human, as Nietzsche put it. For example, the police officer Holzpuke who is in charge of the Tolm "safety net" would seem to have merely an evil militaristic mind if he were only seen from others' points of view; but Böll allows no dismissive or satiric categorizing here. "Strictly speaking," we find Holzpuke thinking, "it could be of the utmost importance to know with whom this woman had taken up that somewhat intimate connection which led to the condition known as pregnancy." The evasions suggest not only an unnatural distaste but professional anxiety, the desire to control and categorize feelings. Holzpuke goes on in this passage to work out the identity of the "impregnator," and he is not in any evident way evil for having done so. The translation, by Leila Vennewitz, must have been fearsomely difficult; Böll uses about fifteen different internal monologues and each one has to sound right even in a foreign syntax, but I think it works.

Perhaps the best part of this exhaustively-detailed family chronicle concerns Tolm's daughter Sabine. She is unhappily married to a glamour-seeking clothing manufacturer whose sexual proclivities have turned perverse. Characterized as something of a Princess Margaret (horsewoman, beautiful, constantly photographed), Sabine breaks through the safety net by having an affair with her security guard Hendler. Tellingly, the motive here is not simply carnal nor even romantic to begin with, just the desire to break the barriers. By making love to Hendler, Sabine recovers privacy and autonomy. By betraying his "duty," Hendler does too. Böll carefully prevents any cheapening of this relationship with sentiment. Its vigorous car-

[9] THE SAFETY NET, by *Heinrich Böll.* Trans. by *Leila Vennewitz.* Knopf. $13.95.

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nality springs from their deep personal need to escape the net: "They realized [their affair] wasn't a lapse, a one-time indiscretion that had arisen from the situation, simply happened and been forgotten. It lay deep, sank ever deeper, now never to be dislodged."

While the "enemies" become all too human in this novel, the perceived "good" people undergo an opposite process and begin to share more than perhaps we would like with their enemies. Old Fritz Tolm, for example, the prime reason for the heavy surveillance, is also one of its creators. Having abandoned architectural studies for liberal journalism and surrendered his liberalism to the profit motive, he retains a margin of superiority over others like him only because he has a better conscience and a richer sensibility. Yet this very superiority is being used politically, to dress up the consortium with a aura of traditionalism. One of the more chilling moments in the complex, book-long characterization of Tolm (who remains through it all sympathetic but not perfectly good) comes when he's thinking about his valet Blurtmehl as a possible assassin. Now Tolm would be unlikely *not* to imagine all such potential dangers to his life; but what's chilling is the way his mind runs down a complete mental dossier on Blurtmehl and another one just as detailed on Blurtmehl's mistress, Eva. Of course Tolm has been briefed and he has reason to remember what he's been told, but the clinical precision of his memory convinces us that he is indeed a powerful and even dangerous man:

> Eva Klensch, who ran a boutique in Frankfurt: Israeli, Turkish, Arab-Palestinian knickknacks, caftans, and the like, made frequent trips—in the opinion of a number of security experts, according to Holzpuke, a little too frequent—to the Near East, had even set up a whole cottage-industry network in Palestinian refugee camps. . . . One never knew, did one, what was being whispered, what was being swapped, when she went shopping in the back alleys of Beirut and its surroundings, and near Nablus, not far from Damascus or Ammam.

The fascination of such a passage—and I wish I could quote more than this fragment—is the way Tolm's prodigious mind ends by working against himself. Once admit the Iago-like doubt or fear, and there's no stopping the anxious brain from conjuring up endless potential evil. The same principle operates everywhere in this novel, as when for example two police spies observe "a boyish-looking man in his late twenties" and decide there is "something *political*" in his movements: he is instantly arrested. So much for the safety of the safety net. Despite certain familial recoveries and reassurances with which the novel ends, I doubt that Böll feels particularly sanguine about Germany today. But at least in a novel every character can become human.

Margaret Atwood meets the responsibility—or the accusation—of

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being a feminist by disappearing into her fiction. Her latest novel begins, "This is how I got here, says Rennie."[10] "Here" turns out to be, literally at least, a prison in an unstable little island republic in the Caribbean. But "here" also means a point of resolution and acceptance in her life. The action, which may sound formulaic in summary, proves to be otherwise. Rennie is a Toronto journalist, specializing in "lifestyles," who undergoes a mastectomy for breast cancer, loses her lover Jake, falls in love with her surgeon, then chooses to run away from it all in the twin islands of St. Antoine and Ste. Agathe. Rennie has been badly frightened by her brush with cancer, by someone's breaking into her apartment, and by the police who invade her privacy almost as pruriently. All this would seem Atwood's set-up, illustrating the epigraph from John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*: "A man's presence suggests what he is capable of doing to you or for you. By contrast, a woman's presence . . . defines what can and cannot be done to her." Despite the ways in which Rennie has apparently been victimized by males, Atwood is more interested in how women perceive themselves passively and in what damage that does. Rennie's arrogant lover Jake, who likes a lot of bedroom play in which he "ravages" her, fails her and leaves not simply because he's calling the shots but equally because Rennie feels ugly and unlovable, unable to accept his love which now seems "charity." Similarly, what the surgeon Paul has done to and for Rennie (saved her life and made her "wound") she cannot shake free from in her own mind, quite apart from the way he fails her personally. Tough-talking journalist that she is, the wounded Rennie has no doubt a significant Hemingway antecedent. "Massive involvement, said Rennie. It's never been my thing." Or here she is thinking about Jake:

> She loved Jake, she loved everything. She felt she was walking inside a charmed circle: Nothing could touch her, nothing could touch them. Nevertheless, even then, she could feel the circle diminishing. In Griswold [her home town] they believed that everything evened out in the end: If you had too much good luck one day, you'd have bad the next. Good luck was unlucky.

As the story moves down to the Caribbean and enmeshes Rennie in much grimmer turmoil than what she escaped in Toronto, Atwood moves back in time as well, filling out the details of Rennie's past with Jake, her mother in Griswold, the changes in her career, her friendship with zany Jocasta. Using concise vignette-like subsections in each chapter, stripping away quotation marks, putting everything in the present tense, even jumping forward in time to give narratives and confessions heard much later, Atwood devises a dense narrative texture, full of subtle interconnectedness and immediacy. As Rennie goes forward to meet the irritatingly righteous Dr. Min-

[10] BODILY HARM, by *Margaret Atwood.* Simon and Schuster. $14.50.

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now of St. Antoine, the eerily-neutral American Paul, and Lora the sleazy blonde mixed up in gun-running, we keep finding ourselves thrown back to Canada to understand, again, how Rennie got "here."

One of Atwood's best devices in this interweaving process is to extend one characterization by means of another. About Rennie's father we learn only that her parents were divorced, that she blamed her mother for it, and that when she saw her father again after years of separation his first words were, "You look just like your mother." Atwood immediately shifts to a story Lora tells Rennie of her battered childhood, living in basements with a criminal stepfather. Rennie's unexpressed anger is made visible in Lora, a potential self that Rennie does not yet know enough about. Similarly, Rennie's maverick Toronto pal Jocasta tells a funny story about wanting to sleep with a man she casually dates because he has hefty shoulders: he takes her to his apartment, plies her with drink, invites her to sleep with him, dons his pyjamas and drops off. Atwood neatly connects this little De Vriesian fable of changing sexual mores with the story of Rennie trying to seduce her surgeon: the pairing gives each story more depth. The more passive Rennie seems, the more violently aggressive and vulgar Lora becomes; the more depressed and self-pitying Rennie feels, the more jaunty and funny Jocasta becomes (I wish there were more of her). She runs a second-hand clothing store specializing in violently ugly clothes from the fifties. "Of course it's gross, said Jocasta. But so's the world, you know what I mean? Me, I'm relaxed. A little deep breathing, mantras of one syllable, bran for breakfast. Can I help it if I'm the wave of the future?"

Atwood's venture into Third World politics in this novel has something of the same quality as Robert Stone's *A Flag for Sunrise*: in both books that unconscious North American assumption of personal safety takes a beating, and Atwood creates in Paul (to name just one) a stupid and amoral power equal to anything Stone has devised. Rennie's Canadian innocence might as well be American: she would simply prefer not to know the real world: "Rennie decided that there were some things it was better not to know any more about than you had to." She wants to turn Lora's voice off and think about how to fix up her looks. She doesn't want to know why Dr. Minnow sarcastically refers to "the sweet Canadians." But her tactic of ignorance and evasion is worse than useless; it gets her into deep trouble. The only way for either nations or individuals, Atwood seems to be saying, is to dismiss the bystander role. As both her cancer and St. Antoine's politics show, "She is not exempt." I'm impressed all over again in *Bodily Harm* with what distinguishes Atwood's fiction: its severities. There is not an ounce of self-indulgence in the style, not a trace of feminist cant, no special pleading, and an ironic bluntness that's unsparing. She's a formidable talent, and one who will endure.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

Prophet and Loss

UNLIKE ELLMANN ON JOYCE OR BAKER ON HEMINGWAY, Matthew J. Bruccoli on Fitzgerald[1] doesn't foul his own nest, is a good sport, is grateful, loyal, actually esteems and treasures the blockbuster subject minus which he wouldn't have a career (to say nothing of steady employment). The last American professor with a soul. With soul also: can talk street-talk out of the side of his mouth if he has a mind to: "When Bishop and McKaig went off with two hookers . . . "; but there are limits: "Zelda—who was by no means prudish—was put off by Hemingway's bawdry." Zelda and Hemingway loathed each other at first sight and forever after (in one of her more entertaining moments Zelda accused Fitzgerald of homosexual relations with Hemingway); as for Bruccoli, he too is "put off by Hemingway's bawdry," which he believes caused the morbidly susceptible Fitzgerald to resign from the Boy Scouts and "develop a streak of scatological humor. . . . Hemingway announced that he was planning to insert a subtitle in his novel: 'THE SUN ALSO RISES (LIKE YOUR COCK IF YOU HAVE ONE)/A Greater Gatsby/(Written with the friendship of F. Scott Fitzgerald./Prophet of THE JAZZ AGE).' " I'd better point out, because Bruccoli doesn't, that in this *jeu d'esprit* Hemingway was not only talking dirty as usual but amusing himself at the expense of the protagonist of *The Sun Also Rises*, who if he had had one would have married Brett and lived happily ever after.

Bruccoli is fond of Fitzgerald, feels protective toward him (and hostile toward bad influences on him), admires him, probably worships him; would rather do him up with a blue ribbon than do him in. Besides Bruccoli is a risk-taker, has by his own confession mortgaged his academic standing and jeopardized his domestic tranquillity and perpetrated reams of duffer's prose over almost a quarter-century to establish his claim as custodian of the estate, five or six memorized jokes at the ready, browbeating the tourists with his windy familiarity—"My wife, Arlyn, has accepted her subordination to Fitzgerald for twenty-three years; she vetted two drafts of the biography and made many discouraging recommendations. I have neglected my children, who retaliated by taking my pencils." (1) I'd guess that "vetted" means "treated for hoof-and-mouth disease"; (2) Wifely Discouraging Recommendation No. 1: "Burn it! Burn it!" she screamed, hurling it into the fireplace as if she were poor Zelda

[1] SOME SORT OF EPIC GRANDEUR: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald, by *Matthew J. Bruccoli.* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $25.00.

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on a crazy Sunday after one too many of those glamorous weekend parties at the Murphys'; (3) maybe when they stole his pencils his children were trying to tell him something. But no sacrifice is quite without profit for a thrifty man: e.g. Bruccoli likes lists not only because Fitzgerald liked lists—remember the list of Gatsby's visitors with their droll names?—but because Bruccoli is determined to get as much mileage as he can out of those random bits of information accumulated in drawerfuls of three-by-five cards during twenty-three celibate years in that drear and windowless basement carrel in the university library: "The year 1896 was the birth date of Benny Leonard, Legs Diamond, James Doolittle, Rogers Hornsby, Lillian Gish, Buster Keaton, Philip Barry, John Dos Passos, and Robert E. Sherwood. . . . "

The case he intends to make is so obvious to Bruccoli that his statement of it is sometimes obscure or unintelligible to anybody else: for instance he argues that Fitzgerald wasn't, as "a certain kind of Twenties buff" assumes, "an uncritical reveler" (was he, then, a *critical* reveler? or a creative one? or *neither* a reveler nor uncritical?); and "Many of us share Samuel Johnson's admission that 'the biographical part of literature . . . is what I love most' because great writers perform the world's most precious and enduring work" (a sentence it would have cost even Dr. Johnson a few wrinkles of perplexity to disentangle). At any rate Bruccoli isn't light summer reading, for there's many a clause to give us pause: "the popularization of the Fitzgerald myth has diminished his stature and cheapened his work" (presumably Bruccoli was muddling toward something like this: "though it has diminished and cheapened his *reputation*, it can't affect his *work*, which remains as pristine as Lillian Gish or Rogers Hornsby"). All the same which of us except a flint-hearted critic would have the heart to propose that, dazzled by the proximity of such a hero, his chronicler ought nevertheless to pull himself together and do some decent writing? Yet more than hero; fertility god! Hence Bruccoli concludes his very first chapter, "It would have seemed absurd in 1940 [the year of Fitzgerald's death, the year Wendell Willkie ran for President] to suggest that . . . [Fitzgerald's] elegy had been written in 1821 when Shelley mourned Keats—Fitzgerald's favorite poet—in *Adonais*. . . . None of the obituaries anticipated that Fitzgerald would be resurrected like Adonis, the beautiful youth adored by the goddess of love." Nay, by the gods, to suggest such stuff as late as 1982 seems absurd at a pitch beyond hype or even hope. Furthermore Bruccoli won't let up, he ends his book with a comparable manic flourish, a matching bookend of bravado: "F. Scott Fitzgerald is now permanently placed with the greatest writers who ever lived, where he wanted to be all along. Where he belongs." Legs Diamond would have been astounded. But wishing won't make it so, printing it in a book won't make it so, repeating it like an incantation won't make it so; insist though he

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may, it's writ in water (as John Keats, Fitzgerald's favorite poet, would romantically say) rather than (as, seized by a fit of classical inspiration, Bruccoli might say) carved on the up-ended tombstone of the resurrected god. Meanwhile it's a relief to learn that there was an appropriate private satisfaction vouchsafed to this faithful Achates at least once during his long labor of love, as he daringly tells the world in his dedication to Fitzgerald's daughter: "To Scottie/For 9 October 1964."

Fitzgerald is one of those writers who look better in the memory and in the outline-histories of literature ("Prophet of the Jazz Age") than in the pages of his books. For the perennial superannuated, to whom their childhood is more magical than their second childhood (Talleyrand: "You don't know what life can be like unless you lived before 1789"; all the Englishmen born during the last three decades of the nineteenth century: "You don't know what life can be like unless you lived before 1914"), Fitzgerald's titles are enough by themselves, they provoke nostalgic hyperventilations, images of plummy pathos: *This Side of Paradise*, *The Beautiful and Damned*, *Among Ash Heaps and Millionaires* (the working title of *The Great Gatsby*, which became the published title only because his editor held out for it), *All the Sad Young Men*, *Taps at Reveille*, *Tender Is the Night*, *Flappers and Philosophers*. Everybody under those black umbrellas takes a turn on the soapbox: the flappers talk like sophomores, the philosophers talk like freshmen, the author talks like the Dean of Men: "that emasculated humor we call fun"; "The two vivid years of his love for Caroline moved back around him like years in Einstein's physics." The sentiments are persistently glum and mushy, often women's-fiction sensitive ("She saw through to his profound woundedness, and something quivered inside her, died out along the curve of her mouth and in her eyes. He had moved her. All the unforgettable impulses of first love had surged up once more . . . "); among the characteristic devices of the style are all the impossible-not-to-trip-over tricks and phrases of the magazine-writing of the time or of any time ("Then he took a taxi to the room where he had been living on East Twenty-seventh Street and, leaning across the table that held his drawing materials, fired a cartridge into his head just behind the temple": the failed artist, Fitzgerald himself, a sucker for symbolism and false specification down to the last ambiguous word) because Fitzgerald has more affinities with O. Henry or Frank R. Stockton than with Hardy or Lawrence or Hemingway; the tone is all the awful things we call civilized, it has manners and irony but no grace, it's glib, slack, already from page one sick and tired of life's all-too-briefly-deceiving illusions ("life is essentially a cheat," Fitzgerald wrote to Scottie in one of his late letters expressing, so Bruccoli believes, the garnered wisdom of a tragic life), those flashy and shallow illusions which nonetheless Fitzgerald rather enjoys lingering over because back of the phony

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tinsel may be some real tinsel: "Fifth Avenue and Forty-fourth Street swarmed with the noon crowd. The wealthy, happy sun glittered in transient gold through the thick windows of the smart shops, lighting upon mesh bags and purses and strings of pearls in gray velvet cases; upon gaudy feather fans of many colors; upon the laces and silks of expensive dresses; upon the bad paintings and the fine period furniture in the elaborate show rooms of interior decorators."

Imaginary bad paintings and the bad taste to parade his imaginary ability to spot them; but Fitzgerald bungles out of ignorance and carelessness as well as bad taste, he can usually be counted on to avoid checking the dictionary or thinking his way past a cliché or a fumbled image: "In July he was ordered abroad, and their tenderness and desire reached a crescendo" (which he seems to think means "climax," which perhaps he considered slipping in but rejected because it would be misleadingly or excessively explicit); "Indifferent to any opinion, except Paula's, Anson was nevertheless determined to save the débris of the evening" ("débris" means the unsalvageable fragments of something that has been totally demolished; Fitzgerald thinks it means what remains intact or at least salvageable of something that has been mostly demolished); "Up in her bedroom window Sally Carrol Happer rested her nineteen-year-old chin on a fifty-two-year-old sill and watched Clark Darrow's ancient Ford turn the corner" (vital statistics which, though they omit her twelve-year-old door jambs and sixty-three-year-old hair follicles, are unobtrusively tucked into the narrative as per instructions from the creative-writing teacher); "Josephine and Lillian darted soft frank glances into strolling groups of three or four undergraduates, into large groups on corners, which swung about as one man to stare at their receding heads" (which complemented their seventeen-year-old receding chins); "Glancing sideways at her, Lillian winked at Josephine without batting an eye" (ingenious! since "without batting an eye" means "without winking"). Writing to his publisher about his second novel, Fitzgerald explained that it "concerns the life of one Anthony Patch . . . [and] how he and his beautiful young wife are wrecked on the shoals of dissipation" (thus far Fitzgerald himself is not yet in the slough of despond but he's already wrecking his twenty-four-year-old cerebral cortex on the fifty-two-year-old shoals of dissipation; later, when the débris is falling like ticker-tape all around him, he will try to salvage it with deft glints of irony: "Nothing was impossible—everything was just beginning. He poured himself another drink"). In "The Crack-Up" Fitzgerald compares himself to a cracked plate, but—in his writing at least—he's more like a cracked bell, which in its remote original state may have gone *bong!* but in the unforgiving present keeps going *thunk* instead.

Then there's love and romance: "Again she broke away, listening,

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but as he pulled her close once more she realized that he had said nothing—only *'Darling! Darling!'* in that deep, sad whisper that always made her cry. Humbly, obediently, her emotions yielded to him and the tears streamed down her face, but her heart kept on crying: 'Ask me—oh, Anson, dearest, ask me!' "; "He could not remember when anything had felt so young and fresh as her lips. The rain lay, like tears shed for him, upon the softly shining porcelain cheeks. She was all new and immaculate, and her eyes were wild"; "Her youth seemed to flow into him, bearing him up into a delicate, romantic ecstasy that transcended passion" (and just from *necking!*); "The image of Helen haunted him. Helen whom he had loved so until they had senselessly begun to abuse each other's love, tear it into shreds."

These passages are from several of the best known short stories. The romance in *Tender Is the Night* is more tolerable because the book is Fitzgerald's most nearly serious piece of writing, he tried harder in it than ever before or ever again, but by the time he wrote it his constitutional spiritlessness had reached the point of indifference, which he tried to cover up with the pretense that he was anatomizing the gradual process of a breakdown which as he couldn't acknowledge even to himself had in fact occurred before the action of the book (the excellent English critic D. W. Harding, reviewing it in the year of its publication, conceded its "skill and effectiveness" but was bothered and puzzled by its "painful quality"): "once more he kissed her and was chilled by the innocence of her kiss, by the glance that at the moment of contact looked beyond him out into the darkness of the night, the darkness of the world"; "He saw Nicole in the garden. Presently he must encounter her and the prospect gave him a leaden feeling. Before her he must keep up a perfect front, now and tomorrow, next week and next year";

> "Oh, such a shame, such a shame. Oh, such a shame. What's it all about anyhow?"
>
> "I've wondered for a long time."
>
> "But why bring it to me?"
>
> "I guess I'm the Black Death," he said slowly. "I don't seem to bring people happiness any more."

But in the book he never ever brought them any such thing, all he ever brought was himself—kisses without feeling, measureless anxiety, ruminations dark and fancy.

The Great Gatsby comes a decade earlier, isn't a sacrifice to Fitzgerald's terminal megrims, is a much more careful book; but the care is external and superficial, beginning with the unconscionable droning voice of that wellspring of tact and classy diction, the narrator: "I'm inclined to reserve all judgments, a habit that has opened up many curious natures to me and also made me the victim of not a

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few veteran bores. The abnormal mind is quick to detect and attach itself to this quality when it appears in a normal person, and so it came about that in college I was unjustly accused of being a politician, because I was privy to the secret griefs of wild, unknown men . . . " and so on for page after page of what would seem pachydermatous self-satisfaction if the seasoned reader of Fitzgerald didn't sense trembling beneath it Fitzgerald's terrible need to assume the pose of the normal Princeton graduate who has become a member of the best New York clubs. Here's how the narrator (on his "second glass of corky but rather impressive claret") faces the book's first crisis:

> Her voice sang: "It's romantic, isn't it, Tom?"
>
> "Very romantic," he said, and then miserably to me: "If it's light enough after dinner, I want to take you down to the stables."
>
> The telephone rang inside, startlingly, and as Daisy shook her head decisively at Tom the subject of the stables, in fact all subjects, vanished into air. Among the broken fragments of the last five minutes at table I remember the candles being lit again, pointlessly, and I was conscious of wanting to look squarely at everyone, and yet to avoid all eyes. I couldn't guess what Daisy and Tom were thinking, but I doubt if even Miss Baker, who seemed to have mastered a certain hardy scepticism, was able utterly to put this fifth guest's shrill metallic urgency out of mind. To a certain temperament the situation might have seemed intriguing—my own instinct was to telephone immediately for the police.

—a tableau vivant that might seem less stagy and rheumatic if instead of settling for "shrill metallic urgency" Fitzgerald had given it a second thought, if he didn't insist on breaking fragments into lesser fragments, and above all if he hadn't spoiled the singularity of the ringing telephone by letting the narrator close the paragraph with his "instinct" (Fitzgerald means "impulse") to use the telephone (the same one?) to call the police; but the staginess is incurable: Fitzgerald's "civilized" narrator is just another clone of the Jamesian narrator—impervious and insatiable voyeur—who's always eager to recognize that social restraints are about to dissolve and any minute now there'll be cartridges (blanks) fired into well-barbered heads just behind the temple at the second-act curtain (but he's exaggerating a little, with a touch of sure though quiet wit).

Fitzgerald's life is chronic and tautological, and Bruccoli carries on for six hundred pages rehearsing every dismal minute of it. Fitzgerald goes on benders for months (Bruccoli has another list: "Many of the best American writers of the twentieth century have had alcohol problems: Fitzgerald, Faulkner, O'Neill, O'Hara, Wolfe, Lardner, Hemingway, Lewis, Chandler, Hammett. There is evident-

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ly a connection between alcoholism and the creative personality. . . . Writing and drinking are both forms of exhibitionism and escapism"). Doggedly the prophet without honor keeps producing stories though they are liable to be about somebody at the end of his tether, washed up, burnt out, written out, written off, at a loss ("By 1929," notes Bruccoli, "Fitzgerald knew he had lost something"). Several times he climbs out on the ledge of an open window in somebody's apartment (James Joyce's, on one occasion) and threatens to jump. Many an evening he gets drunk in a bar, picks a fight, is beaten up, spends the night in jail. Zelda notices him look at a girl at a party and without a word hurls herself head first down a flight of stone steps. Zelda is committed to a hospital or sanitarium, Zelda is released, Zelda is recommitted. "During Zelda's hospitalization [in 1930]," Bruccoli reports, Fitzgerald "began sleeping with other women. . . . These brief affairs may have been partly a way of countering Zelda's charges that he was a homosexual." And they may have been partly for fun and games; however, says Bruccoli, "it is impossible to determine the extent to which Fitzgerald's attitudes toward women were shaped by Irish-Catholic Jansenism. Cornelis Jansen (1585–1638) maintained the doctrine of total human depravity . . . " (but then he never met Bruccoli or Benny Leonard). Hemingway was friendly in the early days in Paris, but Zelda saw him as a competitor for her husband's love (which she didn't much want but didn't want anybody else to have either), and Fitzgerald was by all accounts not only drunk most of the time but an exceptionally mean and ugly drunk (in one of his quieter pranks at an afternoon party he "collected the watches, purses, and wallets of the guests and tried to make soup out of them"; on a visit to Hemingway's apartment in Paris, Fitzgerald commanded young Scottie to urinate on the floor in the hallway, she obeyed, the concierge remonstrated, and Fitzgerald threatened to shove the concierge's head into the toilet bowl), so Hemingway backed off and Fitzgerald's feelings were hurt. Fitzgerald asked to see the typescript of *A Farewell to Arms* and, having read it, wrote Hemingway a nine-page memo of suggestions for changes, which Hemingway filed with the notation "Kiss my ass"; but—at a distance—Hemingway was kind: when, later in the same year, Fitzgerald wrote a self-abasing letter, "the *Post* now pays the old whore $4,000. a screw. But now it's because she's mastered the 40 positions," Hemingway replied with good humor and common sense: "(They never raise an old whore's price—she may know 850 positions—they cut her price all the same—So either you arent old or not a whore or both) The stories arent whoring They're just bad judgement—You could have and can make enough to live on writing novels." Fitzgerald's letters to his daughter have been praised for their mature clear-sightedness, but they alternate between conventional family sadism ("She"—i.e. Zelda—"never knew how to use her energy—she's

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passed that failing on to you") and conventional classroom uplift ("*The Grecian Urn* is unbearably beautiful with every syllable as inevitable as the notes in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony . . . ").

It's a sad story, and Bruccoli makes it unbearable. "I am not a great man," Fitzgerald wrote to Scottie in one of the few letters in which he wasn't merely directing and denouncing her, "but sometimes I think the impersonal and objective quality of my talent and the sacrifices of it, in pieces, to preserve its essential value has some sort of epic grandeur." But he was romancing again: "Scott took LITERATURE so solemnly," Hemingway wrote Arthur Mizener, who was working on the second Fitzgerald biography (Bruccoli's is the third). "He never understood that it was just writing as well as you can and finishing what you start." When *The Last Tycoon* was published posthumously, Hemingway wrote Max Perkins, the editor to whom Fitzgerald had generously and enthusiastically recommended Hemingway's writing fifteen years earlier: "Reading the book was like seeing an old baseball pitcher with nothing left in his arm coming out and working with his intelligence for a few innings before he is knocked out of the box." But he was "happy the book had such a fine review . . . in the Sunday Times with such a good picture of Scott. I think that should please Scotty very much and be very good for her because she never really knew how good Scott was." She quite likely didn't, getting all those adjurations in the mail. May he rest in peace under this gingerbread monument.

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ALFRED CORN

Time to Read Proust

DELAYED FOR HALF A CENTURY, why shouldn't the Age of Proust begin now? Partly because this age has become so eclectic that no single author could lend it a name; and partly because Joyce still seems to hold, particularly for us Anglo-Saxons and Celts, some formal insights worth developing. *Finnegans Wake* of course bowed more than once in Proust's direction, not just by noting that "the prouts will invent a writing" and mentioning "swansway" but also by adapting Proust's clockwise-circular narrative form and extending the principle of involuntary recall to the entire history of our "collective unconscious." The UN inclusiveness of *Finnegans Wake* and its oneiric Esperanto incidentally guarantee it an audience among French linguistic-textual critics; but this privileged position it now has to share with *A la recherche du temps perdu*, if with no other twentieth-century novel.

The rapidest glance backward makes clear why the Proust era didn't begin in the twenties for either French or English-language literature. The complete *Ulysses* appeared first—published in cosmopolitan Paris under the benevolent regard of an important group of cosmopolitan writers. A French translation was undertaken immediately. Also, Joyce was still alive, still writing. Even when the *Recherche* appeared in 1927—posthumously—it seemed like the end, not the beginning, of something. The wind in French writing had shifted toward Breton's Surrealism, on one hand, and then Nietzschean thought (atheist, Dionysian, agonized), developed in fiction by Gide, Céline, Malraux, Sartre and Camus. Proust never lacked readers but still had no disciples among his younger contemporaries up to the apostolic succession. In England, the vogue for Proust had begun even before the twenties among writers who read French, but did not grow widespread until C. K. Scott Moncrieff's translation began appearing. Scott Moncrieff died in 1930 before taking up *Le Temps retrouvé*. This last volume was translated by "Stephen Hudson" (Sidney Schiff) in England and by Frederick A. Blossom in the U.S., and then once more by Andreas Mayor. To what degree English writers like Forster, Woolf, Waugh, Bowen, Greene and Green were influenced by Proust, scholars can debate; however small that influence, it has still weighed more heavily with the English than with the Americans or even the French. (Do we have *any* American Proustians? Auchincloss comes to mind; and Nabokov, if he was American; and then Edmund White, who is certainly that. Also, one poet, in the Jamesian mid-Atlantic tradition, stands out as a preëminent Proustian: James Merrill.)

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It's not surprising that the English felt an affinity with the work of an admiring reader of Shelley, Ruskin, George Eliot and Hardy; by the same argument, Americans could expect to feel strong sympathies with this French disciple of Emerson, once they paused to notice the overlap of Romantic philosophy and retrospective temperament in Proust. The length of the *Recherche* and its language may have been a barrier; but those who understand the importance of a great work will always answer its requirements; and those who cannot read French now have an adequate translation[1] of the greatest novel written in the twentieth century so far.

To say "adequate" instead of "superb" needs justifying; but first I should retell the story of this translation. After Scott Moncrieff's version appeared (I use one name to designate the three hands that worked on that version because Schiff and Mayor tried to imitate Scott Moncrieff's style and texture in their renderings of the last volume), most readers praised its accuracy and its sensitive, idiomatic English. Yet others disliked the archaizing, "Edwardian" sound of Scott Moncrieff and pointed out inaccuracies, euphemisms, and bowdlerizations. Those objections, however, led to no attempts at retranslation until the present one. Meanwhile, a new French edition of the novel appeared in 1954, published by the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. The Pléiade edition corrected textual errors of the NRF Proust, added valuable passages discovered by the editors in the jumble of Proust's manuscripts, supplied textual notes and variants, and included both a plot résumé with page references and a place and name index for the gigantic work. Now, twenty years later, we have an English version in conformity with the current French Proust. The Random House edition, published in three volumes, follows the Pléiade text, with the new interpolations tipped in unobtrusively and the same plot résumés added at the end of each volume, though without a place and name index. Some of the textual variants appear in an appendix; and the text notes, different from the Pléiade's, have been composed with English and American readers in mind.

As he explains in his prefatory note, Terence Kilmartin has done not an entirely new translation but a *rifacimento* of Scott Moncrieff, with additions from the Pléiade newly translated. He hoped to satisfy both admirers and detractors of the earlier version, and I think at least the admirers of Scott Moncrieff will be satisfied; this new version hews closely to the earlier. But the detractors? Despite some updatings laid over the old text, the prose still sounds ninetiesish. For a second translator to retain Scott Moncrieff's "the morrow" as a translation for "le lendemain," or "frightfully good" for "très bien" is not to measure up to the proclaimed intention of modernizing the text, and these tokens can stand for a problem apparent

[1] REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST, by *Marcel Proust*. Trans. by *C. K. Scott Moncrieff*, *Terence Kilmartin*, and *Andreas Mayor*. Random House. 3 volumes. $75.00.

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throughout Kilmartin's version. Proust doesn't sound moldy in French; why should he in English? Also, American readers must be prepared for English spellings—"programme," "connexion," "labour"—though I notice, too, a few American "judgments" and "acknowledgments" scattered inconsistently throughout. Tiny flaws, surely; they deserve mention only because the fanfare around this new edition, so handsomely bound and printed, so expensive, so heavy and unwieldy, led me to expect perfection.

Considering that fanfare and that expense, what accounts for the much more serious problem of persistent mistranslation? Kilmartin corrected some of Scott Moncrieff's errors—bravo. Without sorting out who first perpetrated the errors that remain, I would still say the new text should have none at all and am baffled that more checking wasn't done. Reading the first sentence, for example, I was disappointed to see that Scott Moncrieff's mistranslation had been let stand: "For a long time I used to go to bed early." Among several possibilities for translating the most famous decasyllabic sentence in French fiction, this is the last acceptable. "Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure." In a recently published article (*Grand Street*, No. 1), Kilmartin justified the retention as a way of making the verb tense—*passé composé*—blend with the overall imperfect tense of the opening paragraph. But Proust knew grammar and had an acute syntactic ear. The little jolt between the temporal suspension of the first sentence (comparable to verbs in the aorist aspect in Greek) and the flowing, imperfective aspect of the second is part of the intended effect and should be left. "For a long time now, I have gone to bed early," comes closer to the original. (Then the pluperfect tense Kilmartin imposes on the second sentence would have to go; but he could easily have fixed that.)

The grammar of this translation is sometimes substandard. "Cannot help but" is too careless a locution to use for so exact and formal a writer as Proust. I wonder if others object to this sentence: "And nothing reminds me so much of the monthly parts of *Notre Dame de Paris*, and of various books by Gérard de Nerval, that used to hang outside the grocer's door at Combray, than does, in its rectangular and flowery border, supported by recumbent river-gods, a 'personal share' in the Water Company." "So much" should be changed to "more strongly" or else "than" to "as"; Proust's sentence uses the right connectives, and the translator has only to follow them.

Among the dozens of wrong translations I noticed before hopes for a superb translation waned, I will mention one; and perhaps this anecdote will help explain it. On my first trip to France, the language program I had enrolled in billeted its students in French homes—room, board, and conversation. This was in Avignon, and my hosts lived three miles outside town. The locals called the house, with modest irony, "le château"—a solidly built pile about 150 years

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old, with a classic pediment over the front entrance (seldom used) and bean fields that came up to within a few paces of the back door. The ceilings were high, the furniture unremarkable. My first evening there I sat down to talk with my hosts over a thimbleful of homemade *pastis*. Twenty years old and still disoriented, I meant to learn to speak French. I turned to the smiling, florid gentleman (wearing a leather jacket but no tie) who gave me my drink, and asked him "what he did." "Ma foi, je suis paysan," he laughed. France is not nineteenth-century Rumania; it's thoughtless to translate "paysan" as "peasant." There have been no peasants in France since the Revolution, no more than there are in England. If I had been Kilmartin, I would have ruled out the obvious and then chosen among "farmer," "yeoman," "bumpkin," or perhaps "farmhand," depending on context.

I have to object to another detail, not a translation but an addition: Scott Moncrieff's subtitle *Overture*, for the first fifty pages of the novel, should not have been retained. Proust gave the section no title; and, while the translator's argument for doing so has merit, it covers only half the case. Stressing the musical analogy for this novel's structure comes only at the expense of another just as important: architecture or, more exactly, cathedral architecture, "frozen music." Proust once called Ruskin's prose (in a review of the French translation of *The Stones of Venice*) a "nef enchantée," an enchanted ship *or* cathedral nave. The repertory of associations—miraculous ark, medieval ship of faith voyaging down the river of Time—he would certainly have wished to appropriate for his own work; and he suggested the cathedral analogy for his *Recherche* more than once. In that metaphor the reader can be thought of as moving through a series of chapels, volume after volume, under the vaulted roof of the whole structure, all the way to the apse and the *Adoration perpétuelle* of the Host—or *Time Recaptured*. Letting Scott Moncrieff's *Overture* stand tends to erase one of this novel's metaphorical support systems, just as replacing it with *Narthex* would have erased the other.

The remaining secondary titles, and the overarching Shakespearean tag, have been left as Scott Moncrieff translated them, except that *Albertine disparue* is now *The Fugitive*—Proust's original title, and one that suits a novel based on the truth that *Tempus fugit*. The older translations are familiar, and sound right, even though strict accuracy might ask for *Over Toward Swann's Place* for the first volume, and *Toward the Guermantes's* for the third. The title of Volume Two actually means something on the order of *In the Shadow of Maidens in Flower*, but in this case Scott Moncrieff kept a firm grip on inaccuracy, settling for *Within a Budding Grove*, and no one has ever blamed him for the discretion.

Albertine's gang of young beauties as Flower Maidens? Marcel never spells out the connection in precise terms; but the smiling

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bouquets of young women with lofty titles and deep décolletages that he meets on his first evening at the Guermantes's, he compares, with delicate emphasis, to the "filles fleurs" of *Parsifal.* Wagnerian opera, its "endless melody," *Leitmotiven,* and cyclic form helped Proust compose a large-scale human and historical drama, and float it down the symphonic river of Time. (The French word for "saga novel" is *roman fleuve.*) If we see it as a cathedral, then we might also listen to the *Recherche* as an opera, a Parisian *Parsifal,* with the Narrator as an archetypal Pure Fool sent forth on a quest for redemption. Other correspondences: Marcel's madeleine and tilleul stand in as a surrogate Eucharist, and we can compare the fateful Mother's Kiss to the one Kundry bestows on Parsifal to set a seal on those quasi-maternal feelings she has for him. The Guermantes milieu, that citadel of titles, riches and fashion, makes a seductive Klingsor's Castle, with floral sirens as an added enticement to worldliness and sexual entrapment. For the grotesque Klingsor himself, I nominate the Baron de Charlus—though without insisting that any of these correspondences match in every point.

Proust not only reviewed a Ruskin translation but himself translated *The Bible of Amiens*; and he read most of that magnanimous art critic's works, as the scholarly Ruskin essay in *Pastiches et Mélanges* abundantly shows. It's easy to forget that the pre-World War Proust was known as nothing more than worldling, Ruskin translator, and literary critic. He took the risk, formidable for an imaginative writer, of looking like a pedant, aware that this lightened his opponents' task but less concerned to protect himself than to foster truer readings of texts he revered. (Another more recent novelist drawn to this practice is Nabokov—think of his Pushkin. After letting the impulse to mock subside, I find what either of them has to say on *any* subject, even literature, is always worth hearing.) Proust left brilliant essays on not only Ruskin but also Balzac, Baudelaire, Flaubert, Dostoevsky. If he had never published a novel his essays would still have earned him a place as a critic at least as great as Sainte-Beuve, the "villain" of Proust's anomalous criticism-novel *Contre Sainte-Beuve.* What Proust sought in his sacred texts was the visionary dimension. He opposed "idolatry," the worship of things material and external to the soul. Hence he denied any value to Sainte-Beuve's biographical criticism because it focused on externals and not texts themselves, the most accurate record of spiritual development. He would have lamented those studies of his novel that treat it as a simple *roman à clef,* the sort that present, say, Mme de Guermantes as "two parts Comtesse de Greffuhle to three parts Laure de Chevigny," etc.—all of which sounds like some faded recipe for Lady Baltimore cake. Who wants to jingle a bunch of rusty keys when he might simply step inside the cathedral or hear the opera? The metaphysical dimensions to the *Recherche,* the interpretive record of a solitary voyage through life, constitute its real claim on our attention.

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The worldly aspect to Proust's novel was nevertheless indispensable, distinguishing it from purely Symbolist works like those of, say, Maeterlinck. Also, the Symbolist dimension likewise distinguishes it from purely realist or naturalist works like Daudet's *Sapho* (a remote ancestor of the *Remembrance*) or Zola's *Nana.* Proust had read Ruskin's *The Two Paths* and registered its insistent message that art must include both "tenderness" and "truth." Proust embodies just this bipolar conception in his novel, allotting "tenderness" to childhood, memory, and spiritual aspiration, and "truth" to adulthood, society, and human evil. The two "directions" of this novel, need it be said, correspond to that twofold apportionment.

All Proust's commentators point out that Swann's and the Guermantes's directions run as parallel supporting structures throughout the seven volumes; and that the two finally join as one. Swann, the cultivated solitary, of Jewish extraction; the Guermantes, a highly connected tribe of nobles: what do they each epitomize for Proust? One link easy to establish is between the Guermantes and history, France's chivalric past, with Merovingian barons, Crusaders, Renaissance châtelaines, courtiers at Versailles, and the snobbery of the nineteenth-century Faubourg St. Germain, consecrated for fiction by Balzac. And Swann? To stroll over toward his place meant taking the *côté de Méséglise*, so, often as not, his direction goes under that designation. In French these syllables are phonetically indistinguishable from the words "mes églises," "my churches." This is the direction of churches, cathedrals even, art works in general, perhaps. But Swann's connoisseurships lean more toward visual art and architecture—the Italian *quattrocento*, Vermeer, the little churches near Balbec that he recommends to Marcel. (Music one hears in the Faubourg, or at the Opéra, from a box overflowing with jewels and titles.) Then, as Swann's very name implies, he is the exotic, a baptized Catholic, but still by inheritance a Jew, a wanderer, a transient; so that, for example, one goes in the direction of "chez Swann," but toward a demesne inseparable from the Guermantes name. Marcel's travels divide in half as well: to the fashionable hotel at Balbec where he first meets members of the Guermantes clan, and to Venice, the southern city of art with a Romanesque basilica sacred (if by form alone) to Ruskin. If we think of these two as being in the directions Northwest and Southeast with respect to Paris, we have no trouble assigning them to their proper controlling names.

The two metaphoric paths cross and recross throughout the novel and finally prove to belong to one structure, genetically fused at the end in the person of Mlle de St. Loup, the daughter of a Guermantes and a Swann. There are many other comparable fusions. Recall the incident of the "steeples of Martinville," in which the young Marcel observes the twin spires of the Martinville church and the single one of Vieuxvicq, during a carriage ride along a winding country road. The shifting vantage point makes the steeples seem

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to exchange places, and, finally, to line up behind each other into one silhouette. This excursion inspires the boy Marcel's first piece of prose; and the descriptive essay he writes, recast and expanded, eventually appears in the *Figaro* as the adult Marcel's first publication. To him it represented a tentative step toward his vocation; for us it recapitulates the structure of the *Recherche*, a journey along parallel paths that unite at the end.

In *Time Recaptured* the Narrator, describing the novel he wants to write, speaks of a "psychology in space" he will have to devise in order to render the multifaceted reality he has come to understand. Characters will be inseparable from the "sites" where they revealed themselves—and establish their identities most firmly in their locations with respect to each other. These relative "positions"—social, familial, sexual—shift time and again throughout the narrative. "Fugitive as the years," this succession of spotlit stages comes by the end to constitute the dimension of Time itself. More than once Proust has been called the Einstein of novel-writing; and his vision of the final unity of Space and Time led him to devise an astonishing novelistic treatment of Relativity. My guess is that the earliest glimmering of this insight came not from Einstein but from Wagner. During the first scene-change in *Parsifal* Wagner's stage directions keep the curtain up while forest scenery slides away and the two performers on stage are carried aloft on some sort of escalator into the domed hall of the Grail Castle. Just before this transformation, Gurnemanz turns to Parsifal and says, "Du siehst, mein Sohn, zum Raum wird hier die Zeit." In the Universal Theater, Time becomes manifest as a sequence of fast-moving spatial changes. And of course the Swann and Guermantes ways, at their most general, are Space and Time—something implied but hard to discern when, early in the narrative, the two are respectively characterized as "the ideal view over a plain and the ideal river landscape." The reader who wins through to the last page of *Time Recaptured*, however, will know what inferences to draw when the Narrator compares old age to standing on "living stilts" made of years and tall as steeples.

Somewhere between painting and music lies literature; but, finally, it seems closer to music. Likewise we think of Proust's subject as Time more than Space and sense that in his hierarchy Vinteuil sat higher than Elstir. Moreover, Time, when recaptured, is the dimension of salvation, while lived time, actual spatial experience, can never, according to Proust, save us—far from. And the "black gospel" of Proust's pessimism about human love is only one among many repudiations he made in his long assault on idolatry. For Proust, only the achieved soul merits veneration; the rest is dross—riches, social position, even romantic love, even art. That the Narrator's *via negativa* actually conceals an optimistic faith becomes apparent only in the last pages of the *Recherche*. When things or places or people are materially absent, when they have been taken away from

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us, when they exist in no way other than as part of immaterial consciousness, only then do they become sacred. The paradox of involuntary memory points to the central Proustian mystery: how can irretrievably lost moments out of the past return to consciousness as a full, hallucinatory presence? Proust doesn't try to account for the mystery. But it is certainly his surest proof of the immortality of the soul, and presented as such. "The past recaptured" amounts to a trial exercise in redemption, eventually to be repeated at the scale of eternity. If individual consciousness has the power to make vanished times and places present once more, perhaps the soul, after it has entered the long night of death, whether early or late, will be called back involuntarily into universal consciousness by the memory of eternity. Proust wrote as a fool and as a hierophant.

"Men die," said Alkmaion, "because they cannot join the end to the beginning." But just that connection is the task Proust assigned himself. He retreated to a dark chamber (only John Ruskin's self-incarceration at Brantwood during the years of his mental eclipse is comparable), wrote the novel of his life and let it be the resurrection of his truest and most tender memories. The narrative reaches its conclusion as the hero resolves to write a novel identical in every particular with the novel that his resolution concludes. The end joins the beginning; and no sooner had Proust drafted that inaugural conclusion than he died—and became his readership.

The number of his readers, constantly increasing since Proust's death, will probably multiply exponentially from now on. After all, this novel does come close to being a rare instance of modern scripture, making up in comedy and *savoir mondain* for what it loses in prophetic authority. For most readers certain scenes—the duchesse de Guermantes's red shoes, the Queen of Naples' rescue of Charlus from Mme Verdurin's cruelties, Bergotte's death just after seeing Vermeer's *View of Delft* (to mention three)—immediately take on the clarity and permanence of Platonic forms, part of the available stock of our collective memory, sometimes voluntarily, sometimes involuntarily recalled. If Proust's world was a lost Paradise when his novel appeared fifty years ago, it is doubly so now. All the more sacred then? In any case *The Remembrance of Things Past* is due to regain its footing after a period of relative neglect; and, whether or not Proust lends his name to the last part of our century, his novel appears ready to come of age, with a new crop of readers, in the fullest and brightest sense.

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JAMES FINN COTTER

Divining Dante

IN CANTO II OF THE *Inferno*, Dante reveals the eternal origin of his historic journey. He has Virgil say that Beatrice came to him on the poet's behalf at the request of Lucia who, in turn, responded to a plea from the Virgin Mary. Dante quotes Virgil who quotes Beatrice who quotes Mary and Lucia—a quotation within a quotation within a quotation—as circles inside circles take us to the heart of the poem. At the beginning we touch the end: in an instant there becomes here.

Notice that the links are all conversations, for the poem itself progresses in a series of interviews, face to face, until the final encounter with God in the human person of his Son. Notice, too, that this trinity of feminine requests occurs after the poem has begun, when fear has already driven the pilgrim back from the barren slope. Heaven acts quickly to save our hero. What starts at the celestial heights spirals down to hell with efficiency and speed: here is a bureaucracy that works! But while the poet's imagined journey—from the dark wood of the present to a never-ending vision of God—takes only a week, the actual writing of the *Commedia* took years, years of painstaking labor without a settled home or place to study and create.

Those years of study stretch to our own, as we labor to recreate that original journey, to put it into our strange tongues, to document its numerous references to real and legendary people and events, and to understand its profound moral and theological insights. In his impressive summary of what we have learned and what he would have us learn from his own study of the poem,[1] William Anderson argues that in the Easter season of 1300, Dante actually experienced such a harrowing, purging, and exalted vision of man's place in the universe and that for twelve years he lived with the experience without knowing what to do about it, either spiritually or poetically. Only when he rediscovered Beatrice as the way to symbolize and express the visionary journey did he resolve as poet and man to write and live the original inspiration. The second canto, then, really does reveal the origin of Dante's quest through the intercession of Mary, Lucia, and Beatrice. At last he was able to answer the invitation and begin to write the poem, the whole work before him already known and possessed, just waiting to be told, flowing from him like a river of words.

[1] DANTE THE MAKER, by *William Anderson*. Routledge & Kegan Paul. $45.00.

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For reading Dante's epic, no better companion volume is available than Anderson's generous study. What one usually picks up piecemeal from notes and commentaries here unfolds as the history of a place and time and the traditions that shaped its thought. The civil wars, religious conflicts, literary and philosophical heritage, the story of Beatrice and the poet's biography and other works come into focus chronologically so that the *Commedia* stands on its own with our knowledge fully integrated into the reading of the text, not appended to it. Anderson is a total reader, completely absorbed in his task of getting information in order to give us ideas. He is an ideal guide to a poet who has never lacked voices offering myriad and often conflicting directions.

Beginning with Ruskin's accolade of Dante as "the central man of all the world," Anderson claims that Dante "invented modern literature by making contemporary characters and events the subject of art." He sets out to study the creative process by which Dante assimilated and utilized the knowledge of his time, combining accounts of contemporary events, from everyday happenings to catastrophes, with the love poetry, narratives, political tracts and religious writings of his day. By his fresh inspirations, the poet reshaped experience and reading into a new form, inventing the language and versification in doing so, probing the depths of his own humanity and the heights of the human spirit.

In tracing that process in Dante, Anderson makes some brilliant observations on the nature of creativity and the important part the audience plays by becoming involved in and responding to the artist's inspiration. He writes:

> Works of art are storehouses of psychic energy and they transmit this energy according to the quality of attention we bring to them. The effects of this energy can be described as happiness, awareness, tranquility, or a willing surrender of our private concerns to a universal experience. This energy is extremely volatile and frequently we dissipate it at the moment we receive it. Every now and then, we experience certain works of art so deeply that the memory of them returns again and again to persuade us the energy is not lost but has been transferred to us and stored in the depths of our nature.

Readers receive the same call to enter into the way of the *Commedia* by stripping away greed and deception, by regaining understanding of true goodness, and by seeking the highest illumination possible in contemplative repose. The poem challenges each new bystander to engage in an inner journey that is both particular and cosmic. Seek the inspiration and the impressions will follow. Anderson concludes that "the purpose of art is to change the state of being of the enjoyer, to awaken his sensitivity to the feelings of others, to reveal

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the unity underlying his own nature, and to fructify and refresh through the integration of his psychology his capacity for insight, understanding, and joy." A high order which Anderson manages to fill with enthusiasm and learning because he is such an enjoyer of Dante.

Anderson draws on past and recent psychological studies of creativity to support his analysis; he even includes the latest data about the dual functions of the brain. In the *Inferno*, the pilgrim almost always turns left and in the *Purgatorio* right because the left side concerns itself with rational thinking and the right with image-making and intuition. Perhaps. Anderson does convince me of the *fact* of the original vision in 1300, the late date of the writing of the *Commedia* (not 1308 as usually conjectured but 1312), the persistent efforts Dante made to return to Florence, and the essential importance of Bonaventure's *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* to the structure of the journey (not that I needed convincing), but I am less sure about the poet's adherence to the beliefs of the Templars and his use of their rituals in his epic. Anderson's presentation of the imagery, however, is compendious and incisive, especially the images for light and "coming face to face" when the poet catches the individual characterization of his actors along the way.

With Jerome Mazzaro's study of the *Vita Nuova*[2] we move from Johnsonian fullness to Germanic thoroughness: two better contrasting examples of English and American criticism could hardly be found. Of course, that German method has been currently flavored with French sauces from Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, and Derrida, but the meal remains the same. Surprisingly, Mazzaro and Anderson have much in common once we have mastered the academic menu; both concentrate on the moment of inspiration as the key to appreciation, both treat the poetry as a rite of passage, and both see Dante himself as the unique persona who reveals and conceals his identity through complex language.

The best preparation, I have long felt, for reading the *Commedia* is to read the *Vita Nuova*. There we discover Beatrice as Dante discovered her, a young child, peerless lady, and inspired memory after death. The pilgrims to Rome who seek the face of Christ on the Holy Shroud prepare us for Dante's final dream of his beloved in the *Vita* and for the same pilgrims and the vision of the Son in *Paradiso*. Mazzaro carefully tracks down the numerology that makes Beatrice a nine and he finds correspondences in music and architecture to show the poet's mastery of his structure. The *Vita Nuova* occupies a spot in a network of cross-references, of "betweennesses" of prototypal figures and their fulfillment, of the physical and supernatural realms. It is a book about change: the turning-point in a man's life when what has been and what will be flash dramatically

[2] THE FIGURE OF DANTE: An Essay on the *Vita Nuova*, by *Jerome Mazzaro*. Princeton University Press. $13.50.

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in the still point of what the author is now: a scribe listening intently to his inspiration and a maker moving with all the energy of creativity.

Autobiography came later, according to Mazzaro; what Dante presents is a new form of two previous examples of the literature of the self. Boethius in his *Consolation of Philosophy* described his conversion from despair to comfort in contemplation, while Augustine in his *Confessions* narrated the course of his metanoia from an evil life to a virtuous one. At the outset, Love tells the poet that he has missed aligning the center and circumference of his life. To get himself back into focus and to achieve the wholeness he needs, Dante must bridge his waking awareness with his dreams until, at last, he can dream of the real Beatrice and pursue the divine purpose God has destined for him. That purpose lies beyond the *Vita Nuova* and only comes to be in the *Commedia*. Even at the end of his "New Life," the poet is in-between ("Mid-way in the journey of our life") and waiting for his *figura* or prophetic mission to be fulfilled.

Mazzaro has no patience for readers (I admit to being one of them) who prefer the prose sections to the poems of the *Vita*. To put the commentary before the inspiration is to miss the "liminality" or transitionalness of Dante's going back and forth between individual and community, ego and Self, time and eternity, and all the other vexatious polarities of existence. We must preserve the mystical insight even as we guard the emotions of Dante's human desire for his beloved. He is our fellow sufferer: "Avoiding the mystic's withdrawal to Perfection, he is the 'revealed' model poet of Christian love, tied to history by the fact of Beatrice and challenging subsequent poets to follow in his way." Like Anderson, Mazzaro asserts that Dante "thus extends medieval typology to contemporary life and literature." By claiming that the contemporary method of scriptural interpretation, which understood the text to operate on four levels of meaning, should also be applied to his own poetry, as he did in a letter to Can Grande della Scala, Dante turned tradition around and brought heaven to earth. Later poets would prefer, like Petrarch, the liminality of the *Vita Nuova* to the visionary heights of the *Commedia* as far as using them for models of their own work. Mazzaro concludes his penetrating study with a summary of poetic autobiographies from Petrarch to Pound, with each poet ringing his own changes on the perpetual motion we call art.

In his vade mecum to the *Inferno*,[3] Wallace Fowlie relates Dante's epic to other writers: to T. S. Eliot—from "Prufrock" to "Little Gidding"—and to Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud—as one might expect from an expert on the French Symbolists. "Dante is the fountainhead of literature for me, the source," Fowlie confesses. Without him, there can be no full understanding of modern litera-

[3] A READING OF DANTE'S *INFERNO*, by *Wallace Fowlie*. University of Chicago Press. $18.00; $6.50.

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ture. His influence on Proust and Joyce demonstrates the impact poetry has had on the shaping of novelistic prose. Like the *Commedia*, *A la recherche du temps perdu* and *Ulysses* feature a writer-protagonist who passes through scenes that are organized and orchestrated around encounters with other people. By these meetings, the hero is tested, punished, and rewarded until he emerges, transformed by these experiences. Both books (this is interesting) were preceded by a *Vita Nuova* in which the writer introduces himself with the promise of great work to come: Proust's *Un amour de Swann* and Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* are preludes that break new ground and prepare for the future edifice.

Like contemporary authors, Dante concerns himself with finite man, projected against another dimension without losing anything of his finiteness. Fowlie observes:

> The miracle of Dante's creation is this power of giving to each scene a realistic contour and precision, and, at the same time, of giving to the reader the impression that he is watching a scene belonging to another world, the world beyond death, or at least the fantasy world of obsessions and nightmares.

Dante combines the specific event with the archetypal dream, an ego in search of the Self, "a voyage through the world beyond the world."

"The subconscious is endless and as deep as Dante makes his Hell," Fowlie reflects in his opening chapter. "It is filled with as many grimacing and sad and violent figures as those we encounter in the Italian poem." In the canto by canto explication that follows, however, we rarely go below the surface of paraphrased episodes, background biography, or literary allusions. The study smacks of its classroom origins and, while it provides helpful supplementary reading for students reading the *Inferno*, it remains an introduction. Each chapter comments on the main characters, summarizes the action, and ends with a list of the "Principal Signs and Symbols" of the individual canto. Fowlie neatly connects images and themes that the unwary reader might miss and he writes with a polished ease that is most attractive. His final chapter, "A Note on Reading Dante Today," offers sound advice. To read Dante today, we must bring not only our knowledge of literature and experience of life to bear, but also our deepest beliefs and doubts, our hopes and needs. Fowlie writes:

> A text such as Dante's does not have a timeless, unchanging identity. It is nothing when it is not being read, and when it is being read, it bends and adapts itself to the understanding of the reader, to his limitations and dreams, to the life he has already led and to the life he hopes to lead.

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No teacher and guide could put the matter more simply and wisely.

Numerous printing errors do not help the reader of Fowlie's book, however, as one puzzles over "in" for "it" or "is" and "oppostion" more often than "opposition." We are told that the "suidice" of Pier della Vigna occurred when "he beat his dead against the wall" (that would do it!). To skip ahead, Mark Musa's translation of Francesca's moving account of her fatal love for Paolo is spoiled by the blunder in the climactic line: "The book and its author was out galehot!" (Out, out, brief typo!) One hopes that future printings will correct such errors, but after ten years in print "out" still stands.[4]

As Cary, the first English translator of Dante, and Longfellow knew, *terza rima* will not work in rendering the *Commedia*: they chose blank verse instead. Laurence Binyon attempted rhyme and one limitation of Anderson's study is his use of that translation, although he first gives the original Italian. Dorothy Sayers also gave rhyme a try, but the Procrustean bed tortured meaning almost beyond recognition. Even Ciardi's compromise of rhyming the first and third lines only—with sight and half rhymes allowed—takes too many liberties with the text. The three best and most recent translators eschew rhyme while employing a freely adapted tercet form. Mark Musa, Allen Mandelbaum, and C. H. Sisson in their versions[5] care passionately about accuracy and tone, but they differ as poets and scholars in how they render the original. The easiest thing to do is to start with an example.

In Canto VI of the *Inferno*, the pilgrim wakes from his fainting spell to report with the objectivity and elegance that mark his whole style:

> Io sono al terzo cerchio, de la piova
> etterna, maladetta, fredda e greve;
> regola e qualità mai non l'è nova.

Musa translates:

> I am in the third circle, in the round of rain
> eternal, cursèd, cold and falling heavy,
> unchanging beat, unchanging quality.

[4] The booby prize for Italian Translation Typos must go to the editors of the *Continental Edition* of *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* who, through four editions and despite one reader's protests, continue to print the last line of Petrarch's Sonnet 292: "And ears are heard within the harp I touch." (If you have ears, prepare to shed them now.)

[5] DANTE'S INFERNO, trans. by *Mark Musa*. Indiana University Press. $4.95p. DANTE'S PURGATORIO, trans. by *Mark Musa*. Indiana University Press. $27.50. INFERNO, trans. by *Allen Mandelbaum*. University of California Press. $24.95. PURGATORIO, trans. by *Allen Mandelbaum*. University of California Press. $29.95. DANTE, THE DIVINE COMEDY, trans. by *C. H. Sisson*. Regnery Gateway. $8.95p.

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Mandelbaum:

> I am in the third circle, filled with cold,
> unending, heavy, and accursèd rain;
> its measure and its kind are never changed.

And Sisson:

> I was in the third circle, where it rains
> Eternally, icily and implacably;
> Weight and direction are invariable.

Word for word in the first two lines, Musa adheres most closely to the original, even if he slips in "in the round" and "falling." Juggling words, Mandelbaum seems at first to intend "cold" as a noun. Sisson shifts the tense and makes the adjectives adverbs without losing any of the drama and implacability of the verses. What the poets do with the third line, however, shows something of their individual approach: "measure" and "quality" are abstractions that the Scholastic mind would handily absorb; for the modern reader they say little. Musa elects a daring repetition and "beat" to describe the rain—good choices, but "quality" stays abstract. Mandelbaum is content to keep to the original. Sisson finds two words that are graphic and germane.

The generalizations prove to be true: while all three versions have strength and beauty, Musa comes nearest to the Dante beat, the peculiar rhythm of how a line sounds; Mandelbaum captures the straight meaning but sacrifices the nuance; Sisson takes chances that often pay off for their own poetic effects. All three offer clear, readable, flowing lines that are not Dante (impossible!) but are fine poems in English. Sisson says of his translation: "The result is an imperfect reading of the original, but it *is* a reading with something, however shadowy, of the coherence and stamp of the original." The statement is true of all three.

In *Inferno*, Canto XVIII, Dante recognizes the panderer Venedico Caccianemico up to his neck in excrement. "Ma che ti mena a sì pungenti salse?" the pilgrim asks. Mandelbaum renders it exactly: "But what brings you to sauces so piquant?" Sisson wants a more specific sensation: "But what brings you into this stinging mess?" Musa turns to the original pun: "How did you get yourself in such a pickle?" It happens to work in English as well. In addition, as he notes, *salse* "also is the name of a certain ravine (a *bolgia*, if you will) near Bologna (Venedico's city) into which the bodies of criminals were thrown."

Musa's commentaries are most helpful, especially for the *Purgatorio* and the procession that greets the poet in the Garden of Eden. Mandelbaum includes the Italian text in a handsome format, but a separate commentary planned for each of the *cantiche* has yet to be published. The notes prepared for Sisson's version are by David H.

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Higgins; they are concise and informative. I especially like Musa's conjecture that "the one who made the Great Refusal" in Canto III of the *Inferno* is not, as commonly believed, Pope Celestine V who abdicated in favor of Dante's nemesis Boniface VIII, but Pontius Pilate. In his descent into hell, the pilgrim first sees Pilate and, last of all, Judas to round out his Good Friday journey.

Part of Dante's relationship with his readers, however, involves withholding information from them: sometimes translators and commentators prove too intrusive. In Canto II of the *Inferno*, for example, Musa gives the game away by identifying in his text "the Chosen Vessel" as Paul, while Mandelbaum and Sisson keep us in suspense until the climactic line: "I am not Aeneas, I am Paul." Dante often thrusts us into confrontations with his characters, talking with them, listening to their stories, without informing us of their names right away. In Canto XXVIII of the *Purgatorio*, the pilgrim is befriended by "a solitary lady"; only five cantos later do we learn—in passing—that she is Matelda (whoever that may be: commentators are baffled).

Every student of Dante has his key passages to test everyone else. One of my favorites comes at the conclusion of Canto XVIII of the *Inferno* when Dante gives as an example of flattery the prostitute Thaïs' reply to her lover's question: " 'Ho io grazie / grandi apo te?': 'Anzi maravigliose!' " Musa construes it: " 'Am I very worthy / of your thanks?': 'Very, nay, incredibly so!' " (too literary); Mandelbaum: " 'Are you very grateful / to me?' . . . 'Yes, enormously' " (too tame); and Sisson: " 'Don't you think / That I deserve it?', 'You do, you're marvelous' " (not bad, but ambiguous). Dante, who stole the scene from Terence's *Eunuchus*, condenses the humor and irony into a vignette which I would render as: " 'Aren't you grateful to me?' 'O yes, you were mah-vah-lous!' " At which point the poet closes the Canto with: "And now I think we have seen enough of this."

Dante told Can Grande that the purpose of his poem was to make people happy: "to remove those living in this life from a state of misery and to bring them to a state of happiness." Those to whom I teach the *Commedia* are happiest reading the *Inferno* because, I imagine, it appeals to their fantasy and their sense of justice. Who would not be glad, even in hell, to meet Brunetto Latini, Ulysses, or Count Ugolino? And what a good guide Dante is, urging us onward, with Virgil by his side, the author and sustainer of the journey. We are the company we keep in our reading. Thanks to Dante, each of us is "welcomed as a member of their company" so that we too can say of our being there:

> We walked together towards the shining light,
> discussing things that here are best kept silent,
> as there they were most fitting for discussion.
> (*Inferno*, Canto IV, Musa's translation)

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DORE J. LEVY

The Peony Pavilion

The Peony Pavilion (*Mudan Ting*) by Tang Xianzu (1550–1617) is the masterpiece of Ming *chuan-qi* (or "southern style") drama. Cyril Birch, Professor of Chinese and Comparative Literature at the University of California at Berkeley, has produced a complete translation of the play, offering for the Western audience a work which deserves to be ranked as one of the world's comic masterpieces. Birch is one of the foremost Western scholars of Chinese drama and fiction. In addition to works of criticism, his previous translations include *Stories from a Ming Collection* (New York, 1958), selected scenes from *The Peony Pavilion* in his *Anthology of Chinese Literature, Volume 2* (New York, 1972), and a collaboration with Harold Acton and the late Chen Shixiang on a complete translation of the early Qing *chuan-qi*, *The Peach Blossom Fan* (*T'ao-hua-shan*) by Kung Shangren (Berkeley, 1976). Now, Birch's version of *The Peony Pavilion*[1] rewards the reader with a translation which captures the scope and spirit of the original, a comedy which is one of China's greatest achievements of dramatic and literary art.

Of all the forms of Chinese popular literature, it is drama which presents the most varied and formidable challenge to the translator. The language swings from the most literary, ornamented, and recondite style to the most colloquial and slangy dialect. Not only are there difficulties of language; there are also problems of translating for a Western audience forms of dramatic art so very foreign to the Western notions of drama. Chinese drama remains almost unknown to the general Western audience, partly because of the strangeness of certain elements considered indispensable by the Chinese audience. To begin with, *chuan-qi* are long, easily running to forty or fifty substantial scenes. *The Peony Pavilion* is actually one of the longest *chuan-qi*, with fifty-five scenes. In performance, therefore, the plays would be done over two or three days. A plot synopsis, while perhaps a bit complicated and far-fetched, would be fairly matched by synopses of comic plots from the work of Tang Xianzu's contemporary, William Shakespeare. However, because of some of the distinctive characteristics of *chuan-qi*, plots are developed according to conventions very different from those of Elizabethan comedy. One of the reasons for the great length of the plays is that, unlike Elizabethan drama, in *chuan-qi* almost nothing happens offstage or is taken for granted as background. In fact, when a player

[1] THE PEONY PAVILION, by *Tang Xianzu*. Trans. by *Cyril Birch*. Indiana University Press. $22.50.

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comes on with a detailed explanation of background events, the only people ignorant of these events are either those other characters on stage, or members of the audience who have missed part of the performance. If a Tartar rebellion is included in the subplots of a play, the audience will be introduced to the Tartar prince, his inspiration for rebellion, discussion of his plans with his court and minions, and so forth, with as much detail as if the protagonists were on stage. These digressions, what Birch calls "freshets" of future action, may seem unrelated to the plot until several scenes later, when their significance will be revealed. They may provide considerable confusion in the meantime, to the more "orderly" expectations of the Western audience.

Since such a potential variety of scenes could be the death of any stage manager, stage settings are kept to an absolute minimum. The individual players would be gorgeously costumed, and make up for the lack of background scenery and props with elaborate pantomimes. The actors would also recite detailed descriptions of nonexistent scenery to encourage the audience's imagination.

Another distinctive feature of *chuan-qi* is the importance of music. This, in view of what is to the Western ear the rather startling kind of music typical of *chuan-qi* performance, has led to a cliché image of *chuan-qi* as a sort of cross between an operetta and a circus. However, the *chuan-qi* playwright was much more than a librettist; not only did he need to be thoroughly familiar with the musical conventions of the various dramatic roles, but he also had to be an accomplished poet and prose stylist. Basically, there are three kinds of speeches in *chuan-qi*: prose speeches, verse recitations, which might vary with several poetic meters, and "arias." Arias might be sung by almost any character in every sort of major role, in tune styles considered appropriate to the individual roles. Tang Xianzu's arias were praised for their originality and criticized for "cracking the throats of the empire"—with difficult rhyme patterns and unorthodox styles (*The Peony Pavilion*, Introduction, p. xiii). Of course, depending on the role and status of a character, the music and language would be more or less elevated. Most scenes include all three kinds of speeches, and one can imagine the excitement all this variety of expression would have produced in performance.

Unfortunately, it was extremely difficult to produce such ambitious works in their entirety, and so productions would often be limited to a few favorite scenes, famous either for their dramatic content or for their poetry. Wealthy individuals, for instance, would engage a troupe of players to perform scenes from a repertoire of favorites for private entertainments. Today, with much of the music and techniques of singing fallen into oblivion, it would be virtually impossible to mount a complete production of *The Peony Pavilion*. However, though we miss the music, it is still very enjoyable in the reading. Birch has carefully preserved in his translation the con-

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trasts between the prose, verse, and aria passages, and also the contrasts between the particular speech styles, high and low, of the individual characters. When the characters quote other works of which well-known English translations already exist, Birch has judiciously interpolated versions by other scholars, such as Arthur Waley or Herbert Giles. The lack of costumed players and music is sad indeed, but nevertheless does not detract from our appreciation of the literary merits of the text.

The plot of *The Peony Pavilion* was ingeniously concocted by Tang Xianzu from a group of stories of the late Sung period. Bridal Du, the only daughter of the eminently successful Du Bao, prefect of Nan'an, is beautiful, intelligent, and sexually rather precocious. At the age of sixteen, she yearns for new sensations, and ventures into the rear garden of the family compound during the spring bloom. While in the garden, she dozes and dreams of a handsome young scholar, bearing in his hand a willow branch which gives the clue to his name, Liu ("willow"). He asks Bridal for a poem on the branch, then carries the half-resisting maiden to the peony pavilion and makes love to her. Once awakened from the dream, Bridal pines so for her unknown lover that she becomes seriously ill. Her mother, sensing the cause of her daughter's illness, proposes that a match be arranged for her. Du Bao is incredulous: "What! Among the ancients, 'man takes wife at thirty, at twenty woman goes as bride.' Such a child as our daughter is, what can she understand?" (Scene 16).

Bridal feels her vital forces failing, but before she dies, she paints her own portrait and inscribes it with the poem on the willow branch requested by her dream lover. Her bereaved parents bury her under her favorite apricot tree and, obliged to depart immediately for Yangzhou because of a new promotion, Du Bao arranges for the garden to be kept as a shrine to his daughter's memory in the care of the Taoist nun, Sister Stone, and Bridal's tutor Chen Zuiliang. Three years pass, and the young scholar Liu Mengmei ("Willow Dream-of-Apricot") passes through Nan'an on his way to the capital in search of fame, fortune, and success in the government examinations. He meets with Tutor Chen, who pities his fatigue and invites him to recuperate in Bridal's shrine for a few days. While exploring the shrine, Liu Mengmei discovers the portrait scroll and becomes fascinated. Meanwhile, a judge in the underworld takes pity on Bridal for her untimely death and grants her permission to visit Liu as a spirit. The young man falls deeply in love with her. When her spirit nature is revealed, he sturdily complies with Bridal's instructions to open her coffin so that she may return to the land of the living and, having almost reached the proper age of twenty, become his wife. The miracle complete, the couple elopes to the capital. Liu Mengmei arrives tardily at the ex-

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aminations, but through the clemency of the chief examiner (who also happens to be Liu's former patron), he is allowed to take a make-up examination and carries off the honors of Prize Candidate.

Meanwhile, in Yangzhou, Du Bao is trying to quell the Tartar-incited rebellion of Li Quan and his amazonian consort. Madame Du and Bridal's former maid, the saucy Spring Fragrance, are sent to Hangzhou for safety. Ignorant of the fate of her parents and anxious about their welfare, Bridal begs her husband to go to her father and offer his aid. Fearful of her father's skepticism, she gives Liu her portrait scroll to show to Du Bao as proof of his identity. Before Liu arrives, however, Du Bao puts down the rebellion with a clever policy of appeasement, aided by Li Quan's timely quarrel with a Tartar general. Ever the Confucian rationalist, Du Bao has no patience with Liu Mengmei's fantastic story of his daughter's resurrection and claims of being his son-in-law; moreover, Tutor Chen has just informed him of the "desecration" of Bridal's grave. The portrait scroll confirms to him that Liu is the grave robber, and off goes the young scholar to the rack. He is rescued in the nick of time by court officials looking for the examination's Prize Candidate. Furious with one another, Du Bao and Liu Mengmei resolve to have it out in court.

Back in the capital, Madame Du and Spring Fragrance have been reunited with Bridal and convinced of her return to life. But no amount of persuasion will convince Du Bao of his daughter's living reality until, overcome by despair and frustration, Bridal faints away before the assembled court. Du Bao's paternal affection is touched in spite of himself and, while he may still have his doubts about his cheeky son-in-law, complete reconciliation is achieved.

Although the characters obviously fall into types, often reinforced by the use of allegorical names, Tang Xianzu has infused all the roles with individual life, and presents nuanced and sympathetic characters in every case. Liu Mengmei, a typical romantic lead, shows surprising strength in his genuine devotion to Bridal. The insurrection of Li Quan gives the prosaic Du Bao opportunity to display his resources as a military leader, which makes him seem less of a domineering prig as a father. Even the half-baked pedantry of Tutor Chen lies on a foundation of human understanding, as shown by his intercessions on behalf of the lovers.

The liberties taken by the translator are ultimately to the good of the idiomatic flow of language and certainly a service to the comedy. Footnotes are adequate but not intrusively pedantic, and this makes *The Peony Pavilion* quite acceptable for a popular audience. However, since the high quality of the translation makes this version as valuable for the specialist as it is enjoyable for the non-specialist, the omission of a bibliography is a serious handicap.

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Then, for some reason, an index of aria patterns has been included; but without bibliography, characters, or an explanatory appendix, this index would seem to be of little use.

While the pace and form of Tang Xianzu's comedy is very different from that of his Elizabethan contemporary, the breadth of their visions of humanity is compellingly similar. Themes of romantic love—estrangement and obstacles, reconciliation and reunion—seem to hold the same appeal for audiences separated by vast geographical and cultural distances. To see this familiar range of human experience in such a foreign context may serve us as evidence for the universal generosity of comedy.

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EMILY GROSHOLZ

Poetry Chronicle

IF THE POWER OF APPEARANCES is absolute, as the Greek sophists claimed, then right and wrong are whatever one takes them to be, and power is exercised by whoever can control appearances. Thus the sophists found a flourishing market for their rhetorical skills. Socrates, however, turned their own arguments against them: since they were teachers, some criterion must govern their selection of what to teach. The sophists must covertly assume some stance from which to view experience, and their stance must in turn entail certain moral presuppositions. So Plato showed Socrates unmasking and mocking the presuppositions of Protagoras in the dialogue of the same name.

At the beginning of Part I of his *Allegories of Reading* (Yale University Press, 1979), Paul de Man argues that deconstructive criticism exhibits how a literary text simultaneously asserts and denies its own authority to tell the truth, as the sophists did. "The reconciliation of fact and fiction occurs itself as a mere assertion made in a text, and is thus productive of more text at the moment when it asserts its decision to escape from textual confinement." The power of appearances is absolute. Then art must abjure its claim to criticize experience, and to teach; and the teachers of sophistry replace art, that public forum for testing and revising our understanding of the world, with their own understanding, concealed because unstated.

This development is unlucky for both art and our moral life in general, for, as Socrates spent his life trying to demonstrate, we must criticize experience. All societies, however stable, contain within themselves profound tensions and unresolved problems; the norms of society are a web of ambiguities. In all times and places, the artist provides a critical, corrective and healing function, and in periods of crisis this function is indispensable. To be critical of experience means to look beyond our noses, to relate actively what we ordinarily accept as true to the broader perspectives of history, religion, science, other cultures, and to question our own, always inconsistent, first principles. Art is not only instrumental in this process of education, it is also typical of it, for the work of art must be taken as what it is not and related to something else, its original, which lies beyond it.

All art, then, requires some critical capacity on the part of the beholder, but significant art, which tests the limits of culture and teaches us something about human nature, makes even greater demands. In her study of Beddoes, Yeats and Blake, *Gathering the*

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Winds (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), Eleanor Wilner discusses three ways in which the poet can reflect upon the life of culture, borrowing her terms of analysis from anthropology. The sorcerer takes up a stance of defiant nihilism. Confronted by social forms so outmoded or unbalanced that they have become destructive, and unable to conceive of any order besides the one he has inherited, the sorcerer blasts what he cannot revive, often destroying himself as well. The shaman, poet of tragedy and heroic fatalism, explores the tensions within the traditional social framework, its characteristic abnormalities. He is a social safety valve, who dramatizes the disequilibrium and resolves it on the level of art. In times of relative social stability, the shaman's artifices animate and deepen society's reflection on itself; in times of crisis, they may become reactionary and masklike. The prophet, who arises when social dislocation is most severe, criticizes the framework itself and imagines a new order.

The frontier between nature and culture has always been flexible, and never more so than in the present age. What should be considered fixed, what revisable? What falls outside the sphere of human control, what shall we take responsibility for? The current feminist movement is a striking example of such a categorical shift, which arises out of a long-standing imbalance about which social crisis has gathered, and is gathering still. Against the background of this development, the poetry of Sylvia Plath, Julia Randall and Adrienne Rich can serve as examples of sorcery, shamanistic artifice and prophecy.

In *The Collected Poems: Sylvia Plath*,[1] Plath's poetic opus is presented in chronological order, and framed by biographical notes which locate the poems with respect to the events of her brief life. Her later poems dramatize the struggle between a fragile and undeveloped principle of life, often in the image of her two small children, and a powerful, ultimately victorious principle of death, the inorganic: bones, mirrors, snow, the moon. This conflict is played out against another conflict between purity and impurity, whose badges are white and red.

Women, as the debased and subordinate half of humanity, are typically branded as impure. The blood of childbirth, the blood of menstruation are often taken as symbolic of this natural (and therefore unchangeable) impurity. Purity is the form and propriety of things in the place where they belong. If men are the proper version of humanity, then women are anomalous, something unclean and threatening which falls outside the norm.

Plath grants her own impurity. In "Cut," she addresses her wounded body, her thumb with "the top quite gone / Except for a sort of hinge," which goes from dead white to red plush. She is red

[1] THE COMPLETE POEMS, by *Sylvia Plath*. Harper & Row. $17.50; $7.95.

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tulips, poppies in October, autumn's bloody gold, the mouths of Thermopylae. Or she is the queen bee, a murderess with a lion-red body, isolated and "old, old, old, she must live another year, and she knows it."

Her poetic project, then, is to change somehow to a state of purity. On the one hand she appeals to her children; their innocence and her loving connection to them may redeem her.

> O love, how did you get here?
> O embryo
>
> Remembering, even in sleep,
> Your crossed position.
> The blood blooms clean
>
> In you, ruby.

On the other hand, she could go white by plunging into the hard, separate and fixed inanimate world. So in "The Moon and the Yew Tree," she claims the bald, wild moon as her mother; in "Fever 103°," she becomes "too pure for you or anyone," a moon of Japanese paper; in "Sheep in Fog" she claims,

> My bones hold a stillness, the far
> Fields melt my heart.
>
> They threaten
> To let me through to a heaven
> Starless and fatherless, a dark water.

These strategies of purification are, however, inadequate taken alone, and, together, irreconcilable. The children are too vulnerable and powerless to sustain their purifying function; they are in constant risk of being polluted themselves. "You say I should drown my girl. / She'll cut her throat at ten if she's mad at two" Plath writes to a hateful acquaintance. And the immense whiteness of nature, so powerful, so negative, is death, a perfection which is the end of all poetry, of Plath and the children as well. In the last poem Plath ever wrote, the moon triumphs over a "perfected" woman, laid out with a dead white child on either side.

With no hope of changing the social categories which render women impotent and impure, prisoned in an outworn marriage and hopeless motherhood, impoverished, isolated and sick, Plath wrote out and sank into the Ultimate Solution. Even when she tried to tap the red sources of her own power, the blood-jet of poetry, she produced savage phantoms, the red-haired Lady Lazarus, the killer of Daddy, Herr Doktor, Herr Enemy, who declared herself their victim.

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Plath's inner division was peculiar to her own deadly neurosis, but it was also characteristic of her era. She was a mirror of implacable honesty, revealing real disorder to which, however, she could imagine no alternative. A sorceress, finally, she brought the violent world down on her own head in a fury of hopelessness.

In Julia Randall's *The Farewells*[2] we hear the voice of a stable soul, content in its solitude, of a woman who has lived long, published much, travelled widely and earned her living as a professor of British literature. She is a wise shamaness, squarely confronting the bitter divisions of the world and the imminence of old age and death, who finds her integrity in the unities of art. Art is the only defense against disorder, a structure imposed by the will and intellect on the always recalcitrant disorder of things. So Randall's composure must always be recollected by the next poem she writes, the next time she listens to Mozart. Motherhood would not serve her, nor marriage; she is the valiant bluestocking who chose to take care of herself.

> At sixty-nine,
> I am in a place my mother has never been.
> I may make seventy, seventy-five,
> and not a soul alive
> to scout me. I must make shift
> in this dispensation, finally free
> to foot it, shoeless as I came,
> into my life, her gift.

Very few poets writing today can match the precision of Randall's poignant lyrics, their formal perfection, the control of sound and image. Society's tragic errors are represented with sorrowful detachment, and forgiven; the stoic poet creates a calm circle from which the world's turbulence can be inspected and absolved. If the sycamore and apple trees of her native Maryland county are threatened, she does what she can with the greybeards of the county council, but concludes that the survival of "Beauty in her rocky holds" has always been precarious and is even more so now, threatened by the cold will that severs soul from earth. In "Hardwood Country," Randall finds in the conflagration of October a symbol for that possible, final Autumn we are all facing, and still claims a recourse.

> So, sourwood, a skint and vital thread.
> So, tupelo, great thigh and golden head.
> So, wasted Ilion, that burned for Greece,
> Hekabe helled, and winter in the house
> of all but poetry, whose haut amens
> skitter to sleep beside the evergreens.

[2] THE FAREWELLS, by *Julia Randall.* Elpenor Books. $10.00.

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What women in particular had learned to accept, the old errors and annihilations, Randall sidestepped in her life and art, through skill, self-reliance and stoicism. Some hope for their long suffering she can hold out, but only as emblem and symbol, an ideal pattern outside of life.

> What possesses women so?
> That light shall live where children play,
> monstrosity and pain aside;
> criminal poverty; the bride
> bloodied, not then, but in the run,
> drugged daughter, and delinquent son,
> warrior years from home dropped down.
>
> Not here, not here, not here she cries,
> in spent earth and invaded skies,
> but there, not present to the eye,
> where virgins bear, and all the high
> destiny-makers mock and chop
> vainly as Herod at a thought
> travelling immeshed in rock and star
> and tree, travelling like prayer,
> knotted in Gordian desire,
> at a flash, free.

Randall's poetry is a beautiful holding-pattern, which needs to be brought back down to earth, which the earth must rise to meet.

There has been a groundswell during the past two decades, a change of popular beliefs about the nature of women, a shift of norms. This shift questions the odd anthropological "constant" that the tasks of women are disjoint from those of men, and not only different but less valuable. If we are creatively to determine how a society which rejects this assumption shall reform itself, women must emerge from their imposed or elected solitude to cooperate with each other, and the ancient hostility between man and woman must be tempered.

It is not too much to say that the feminist movement made the later poems of Adrienne Rich possible, for they are informed by a living optimism which testifies to the fact that she feels she is not alone, and speaks for others as well as for herself. For women, of course, but Rich is in the truest sense a humanist, and although she is a lesbian leaves no one out of her vision.

In the past, the prophet produced a new myth, invoked divine right, designated a certain people as "chosen" and claimed to establish a new order, which was inevitable and permanent. This kind of prophecy has no place in the modern age, where our conception of history and nature, and of the thoroughgoing contingency of human action, renders it unbelievable; and where the dangers bred by

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dogmatism in the name of a god, a race or a utopia have been all too murderously demonstrated. (The radical feminist Mary Daly is just such an anachronistic and therefore unhelpful prophet.)

Yet we still need individuals whose imaginative work can be used as a communal resource by people passing through a time of intense conflict. The modern prophet is someone who cannot find her individual wholeness without at the same time trying to imagine a new order for society. She makes our present disarray a visible and painful experience, searches history for forgotten promises, critically examines the present and projects a future, recreating the inherited store of symbols and moral judgments.

Such a prophet is Adrienne Rich. Her latest book, *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far*,[3] is an angry castigation of the sickness our society tolerates, a meditation on history and a love song to the possible future.

In "The Images," she describes the extraordinary vulnerability of women alone in the black heart, the power center, of Manhattan.

> And what can reconcile me
> that you, the woman whose hand
> sensual and protective, brushes me in sleep,
> go down each morning into such a city?
> I will not, cannot withhold
> your body or my own from its chosen danger
> but when did we ever choose
> to see our bodies strung
> in bondage and crucifixion across the exhausted air
> when did we choose
> to be lynched on the queasy electric signs
> of midtown . . .

Whoever thinks this passage is hyperbole should walk down 42nd Street and read the alphabet of misogyny scrawled across the porno theaters, the faces of the prostitutes and their shadowy pimps; or watch the fear flicker off and on in the face of any woman who walks by herself in a half-deserted part of town.

Many of the poems in this book invoke foremothers. "Culture and Anarchy" invokes the "energy I cannot even yet / take for granted" which lies ready for discovery in the books of Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Barrett, Jane Addams, Harriet Tubman. In "The Spirit of Place," Rich visits the house of Emily Dickinson at Amherst.

> This place is large enough for both of us
> the river-fog will do for privacy
> this is my third and last address to you

[3] A WILD PATIENCE HAS TAKEN ME THIS FAR: Poems 1978–1981, by *Adrienne Rich*. Norton. $12.95; $4.95.

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with the hands of a daughter I would cover you
from all intrusion even my own
saying rest to your ghost

Thus the living poet confronts her predecessor, accepting her influence, respecting her distance: this place is large enough for both of us. So Rich belies the dogma of Harold Bloom that great poets must confront their spiritual parent with the fierce, fearful intolerance of Oedipus.

As for the future, Rich speculates upon a world where the female arts of survival will not be perverted into rituals of self-hatred, where daughter-in-law and mother-in-law can ask each other the right questions without resentment, where women can be friends and even, sometimes, lovers without fear of betrayal or persecution. This future is not certain and cannot be dictated; if it grows out of the present, it will grow slowly.

The work of winter starts fermenting in my head
how with the hands of a lover or a midwife
to hold back till the time is right

force nothing, be unforced
accept no giant miracles of growth
by counterfeit light

trust roots, allow the days to shrink
give credence to these slender means
wait without sadness and with grave impatience.

With grave impatience and a wild patience, wait for the dream of a common language, a common project, to take us further.

What are the poet's resources for achieving a critical perspective upon culture, a distance from which human nature can be condemned, forgiven, reimagined? History is one, for the study of history is the search for human values. Nature is another, for culture can only thrive when its norms respect the ground of nature. And the two are necessarily linked, because history, events which cannot now be altered, becomes a part of our nature; and nature is variably represented in history, as each culture defines its own limits with respect to nature in its own distinctive way. Of the poets whom I shall discuss below, Alan Shapiro and Gjertrud Schnackenberg make their appeal to history; David Brendan Hopes and John Engels turn to nature; and Jayanta Mahapatra and Philip Levine, whose wisdom is most developed and complex, engage both principles as they meditate upon human action.

The student of human history tries to uncover past cultural norms which explain the actions of the people he studies; for the

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actors themselves, these norms justified their deeds. Alan Shapiro, in his second book of poetry, *After the Digging*,[4] has chosen to examine two historical periods during which the prevalent norms were so alien that it is almost impossible for him (and us) to sympathize with them. We regard what his characters do as intelligible but not justified and therefore as determined rather than free. Thus our imaginative connection with them is impoverished; either their example does not apply to us, or, if it does, we share their doom of unfreedom and inherit the evil they succumbed to. It is significant that Shapiro refrains from speaking in the first person in these poems; there is little to develop in the relations between the historian-poet and his subjects.

In "Captivities (Poems on the New England Puritans)," Shapiro explores the psychology of a religious fanaticism which violated, in trying to escape, the natural ground of sexuality and the body. "Hands of Compassionate Women," for example, is a monologue spoken by a woman of Boston Congregation, whose guilt at the happiness her child gave her became, finally, a tangle too thick to clear. Tormented by the uncertainty of God's grace, to which infinitely culpable human nature can never on its own lay claim, she drowned her baby in a well, so that at least she could know for certain she was damned.

> I have been cast out of God's furnace now,
> as he once cast the child out of my loins,
> much as I cast the child, my only hope,
> my only child, this morning, into a well.
> But I have come to tell you, you good people,
> that when I heard her small weight hit, her one
> brief cry, I felt—as you may never feel—
> that what He hath intended hath been done,
> and praised Him for the light He took away,
> and praised Him because I knew, at last, that I
> was damned, and that the dark was comforting.

"After the Digging," the title poem, is a series of letters, monologues and journal entries which reflect upon the Irish famine of 1846–49. In this earthly hell, inflexible colonial power does nothing to prevent the hopeless starvation of the colonized. Irish peasants die along the roads and in their own houses; the lucky ones, the emigrants, are decimated by fever, diarrhoea and thirst in the holds of the ships bound for the New World. So Great Britain exported her Irish (and America imported her black slaves), and the sins of the fathers burn over child and grandchild, for how can such suffering be understood or redeemed?

[4] AFTER THE DIGGING, by *Alan Shapiro*. Elpenor Books. $9.00.

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Who have endured must now endure
a healing no less unbearable,
must be consoled by hate's cold feel
fixing all their memories
into a purpose stronger than life,
immutable as loss.
They go
and may God go with them who bring
into the new world nothing else
but epitaphs for legacies.

British officer of the Relief Commission, Irish cabdriver, sea captain, Puritan minister: Shapiro is a gifted imitator of voices. At this point, however, he needs to let his own voice emerge from and answer the tragic chorus which he has assembled.

Gjertrud Schnackenberg's *Portraits and Elegies*[5] begins with a long poem in memory of her father, Walter Charles Schnackenberg, who was a professor of history. In each section of the poem she moves between the present, where she has lost him; the family's private past, at home and travelling around Europe; and public history, which her father first taught her to consider, which she has now learned to consider on her own. Schnackenberg's ambivalent relation to her father—great love, great fear, great admiration—is set out in carefully told anecdotes which suggest that it was the first and decisive paradigm for her ambivalent relation to the world.

Her father was an historian who pondered Martin Luther and Turks in Vienna, Van Gogh painting stars with candles in his hatband, and watchtowers and censorship in Chile, in the Philippines, in Greece; whom history drove to "a metaphysics of impersonal praise" and grief without resolution. Thus Schnackenberg speaks of the two of them leaving Neuschwanstein, having found King Ludwig's castle the gold-iced harbinger of Fascism.

We linger, for a moment, at the gates:
Here Ludwig, in his grisly innocence,
Plucked waterlilies planted an hour since
By silent gardeners, hurled his dinner plates
At statue-niches peopled with assassins,
And wept that Nietzsche called his love a Jew.
It is November, 1962,
A siren from the village rises, spins
Itself into a planet of alarm
That hangs a moment in the wilderness,
And dusk comes through the forest with Venus,
Star of emergency, upon its arm.

[5] PORTRAITS AND ELEGIES, by *Gjertrud Schnackenberg*. Godine. $8.95.

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The brilliance of Schnackenberg's style, at the level of word, image and conception, should be apparent from this passage. Ludwig's magnificence, the village siren recalled from 1962, immortal Venus compose a baleful emblem which signals a dark epoch behind, darker epochs to come.

The book's central poem, "Darwin in 1881," is a profound meditation on the figures of Darwin and Prospero, on the relation between one's life and imaginative work. As Prospero broke his wand and took off his robe, Darwin declined his own honorary banquet at the Royal Academy, put his voyaging behind him, and settled down to family life and his memoirs. His researches have made him an odd specimen, have impressed upon him the odd transformations of nature: the species of Aristotle and Linneaus are not fixed after all, but melt and merge, more like the stream of ocean than islands. At the still center of the storm he conjured with his book, he is content to sleep beside his sleeping wife:

> He lies down on the quilt,
> He lies down like a fabulous-headed
> Fossil in a vanished riverbed,
> In ocean-drifts, in canyon floors, in silt,
> In lime, in deepening blue ice,
> In cliffs obscured as clouds gather and float;
> He lies down in his boots and overcoat,
> And shuts his eyes.

David Brendan Hopes is a student of nature, a hermit by temperament and a jogger whose clearest hours are spent running in the mountains through every season and weather. His first book, *The Glacier's Daughters*,[6] is the winner of the 1981 Juniper Prize. Hopes has no particular poetic use for history; his few poems about human society seem to describe only another strange ecological niche, and his human persona, the runner, tends to fade into the natural surroundings it so closely observes. Yet this tendency must be arrested at some point, to avoid a reductio ad absurdum. There must be a singer and someone to listen to him; someone must write the book of nature and someone read it, for nature is wise but illiterate.

> In Labrador Pond the heron makes letters:
> S for the stalking; *lambda* for the reaching out,
> one foot where it was and one where it wills;
> *lamed* for the waiting, a wood heron
> not even wind ruffles, the water eyes
> behind the steel dagger of the beak,
> holy, Hebrew, abiding the instant of the kill.

[6] THE GLACIER'S DAUGHTERS, by *David Brendan Hopes*. University of Massachusetts Press. $8.00; $4.00.

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It strikes. It is alpha, aleph, first.
Psi airborne, the monogram of soul.

Hopes sings like an Irishman. His complex rhythms, blood-pulse, breath-beat, runner's footstep, weave in and out of his long stanzas, with their characteristic shape. He is also a master of slant rhyme and consonance, as the play of the "w"-sounds, aspirates and liquids in the last passage reveal.

He knows the birds, the trees, the wildflowers; like Robert Hass, he can name them all and tell what they do throughout the seasons. Their susceptibility to naming, their annual cycles, testify to a deep-lying order. The heron casts his reflection on the pond and the pond returns it; though their exchange is not what we would call knowledge, it is sentient and equable.

He glides to his image on the pond's face,
heron spread over heron; the wingbeats
indistinguishable though one is creator and one creation,
one the lover and one the caress of his love
upon the black face of his beloved.

If the world is a great interlaced organism, endures winter and wakes itself in spring, maintains its creatures as suppliant, predator, lover, root and wanderer in a light balance, produced us and will take us back, then why not call it wise, and admit that its wisdom must limit and regulate our own?

The poetry of John Engels' fourth book, *Vivaldi in Early Fall*,[7] is set in the countryside around his homestead in Vermont. Here the human figure is not just passing through, like Hopes's runner, though he is still solitary; he makes his home at the center. Engels' vantage point is the door or window of his house. His poetic habit is to assert some analogy of form or purpose between the concentric spheres of body, house (or domesticated nature) and nature in the wild, and it sometimes produces interesting insight. In the poem "Artesian," for example, he compares underground river, well and plumbing, and the blood's circulation as sources whose pulse we listen for, whose dryness we fear.

Always, to my conviction,
it is there, bellowing
hundreds of feet
beneath the house,

the river, which has never
to this day gone dry, not even

[7] VIVALDI IN EARLY FALL, by *John Engels*. University of Georgia Press. $8.50; $4.50.

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in the hottest summer, never
in the greatest drought,

though when I lie awake
and listen for it, I
hear nothing, only
from somewhere deep

in the deepest parts
of the cellars of whatever
house I have lived in, slow
tricklings of seepage

into the sumps, at times the slow
trickle and thump
of earbloods: all powers of gathering
to which the heart gives rise.

Engels writes with slenderer verbal means than Hopes, and produces his best music when it is spare and restrained. He is visionary too; but his assertion that the form of human things is the same as that of natural things is often implausible. For what will guarantee the analogies in the specific and formal manner in which he draws them? Engels does not always give us sufficient reason to believe in the correspondences he invokes. Hopes does not run this particular risk of failure, because he never claims that the glacier's wild daughters, "toothwort, ironwood, hart's tongue, bracken," are anything like himself. Rather, they are that rich, dangerous overabundance which is the precondition, but not the model, for human life.

In Jayanta Mahapatra's *Relationship*,[8] recently selected by the Indian National Academy of Letters for its 1981 Award, nature and history are not distinguishable at the level of either image or idea. This long poem is difficult, and written in not quite standard English; but it is fascinating and moving, and opens up upon every rereading. Some of its obscurity may stem from its author's over-loaded imagination. In addition, however, it is tied to a particular place, like Valéry's "Cimetière Marin." Just as many dimensions of the latter poem are revealed to someone who stands on the hillside at the edge of the little seaport of Sète, surrounded by white marble crosses and mausoleums, so too this poem belongs to the ruined thirteenth-century temple of Konarka, near the Bay of Bengal in the province of Orissa. Its form is that of a great chariot with twenty-four monumental wheels.

The poem recounts a journey into the sources of darkness or guilt, a personal burden and an historical bloodguilt. The poet enters an earth of forbidding myth, the realm of the dead.

[8] RELATIONSHIP, by *Jayanta Mahapatra.* The Greenfield Review Press. $2.00.

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Time
and the boat,
and the initiation into the mystery of peace;
the sailing ships of those maritime ancestors
who have vanished in the black Bay without a trace,
that live only in the sound of the waves
flinging themselves onto the dark fringes
of this land from Chilika to Chandipur.
But time has no mouth,
and the black labyrinth
of casuarinas along the edges of the sea
closes the sky's eternal vault . . .

The vanished past (of the ancestors, of the poet) maintains a kind of existence in the sound of waves, "in the ocean's strange and bitter deeps, / that subterranean river in the rock"; in fact, it cannot really vanish, for time has no mouth. It is caught between the closed vault of sky, inverted vault of sea, which are sealed by the rows of casuarinas.

Again and again, the poet dreams himself to deeper levels; he dreams the temple and the jungle, the warm indigo water of the tropics, the eternal half-light of rain. "I know that I can never come alive / if I refuse to consecrate at the altar of my origins." His dream is as much the body's creation as the soul's; perhaps it is truer to say that Mahapatra dreams with his body. When he wakes at last out of the dream of pain, guilt, the decline of old age, in which he feared to drown, Mahapatra is able to draw what confronts him to himself, "with the desire of my hands."

. . . a song rises from the honeycomb latticework of stone
to grip these bones where
a grey water of blood stretches out to the future.

Is anything beyond me that I cannot catch up?

Philip Levine's poems in *One for the Rose*[9] often begin in the midst of the ordinary: "This is an ordinary gray Friday after work / and before dark in a city of the known world." Not just anything, however, can count as ordinary, for it is an honorific term which Levine uses to bless things. Bus stations in Ohio are one of his paradigms, and so are small shops, bars and hotels in midwestern cities crossed off with rows of small, shoddy trees and polluted rivers. His people are working people, his times of day the gray mornings before we go to work and the gray dusk we come back home in. The ordinary is what social and literary convention passes over as transient and meaningless; Levine criticizes these norms through a poetic act of

[9] ONE FOR THE ROSE, by *Philip Levine*. Atheneum. $10.95; $5.95.

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redemption which remembers certain lost places and people, exhibits their significance, calls them by name.

His strategy of redemption is to move back and away from his specific ordinary, viewing it from a great height as someone lifting off in an airplane would, or from the distanced perspective of memory. Thus "Salt" begins with a woman weeping alone in an airport late at night, between a porter mopping the floor and an old cleaning lady emptying the ashtrays. Then up and out: we follow the airplane of the man who has left her, flying from Cleveland to Chicago over cloud banks and the Lakes, as he returns to his wife and children through a light drizzle, and dreams of "the rain that hangs / above the city swollen with red particles / of burned air" or of tears:

> tears which must always fall
> because water and salt were given us
> at birth to make what we could of them,
> and being what we are we chose love
> and having found it we lost it over and over.

Or, again, from a room in the back of Peerless Cleaners, where a little pants presser is telling a child about revolution and the dignity of labor, Levine draws back thirty-eight years, over the conflagration of World War II, the theaters of Europe and the Pacific, and addresses his old instructor.

> Come back, Cipriano Mera, step
> out of the wind and dressed in the robe
> of your pain tell me again that this
> world will be ours. Enter my dreams
> or my life, Cipriano, come back
> out of the wind.

Encompassing his ordinary creatures in a wider vision, Levine shows them riding upon the thousands of days of history, the breast of earth which itself rides on the dark abyss of space. This vision might lead to the wisdom of Silenus, for such expanses engulf and dwarf the pinpoints of light. But Levine, looking back on our small illuminated places, observes that we have nothing except (of course, what else?) each other.

When Levine is moving out in a poem, so that we can see the gold edges of our local cloud, the signs of this transformation are usually wind or water. For someone who believes that the center of creation would like to listen to our music, but can't, that god will not rise from the stone of his cathedrals, wind is a natural replacement for spirit. Wind animates the forlorn geometry of earth, and lifts even the impacted deadliness of our cities. And the sea is

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threshold and freedom for a city kid brought up landlocked in the heart of America, "the sea / rocking the deep cradle of all / of us and water and salt without end . . ." The sea is the tide in our veins, our blood which is mostly salt water, and our tears. When the wind is tangled in the small, shoddy trees of Ohio, it sounds like the sea.

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HAYDEN CARRUTH

Wystan Hugh Auden

DURING THE PAST YEAR three books[1] have added in important ways to our knowledge of Auden and our understanding of his work. Edward Mendelson's *Early Auden* is first-rate scholarly criticism devoted to the poet's writing from his undergraduate days at Oxford until he emigrated from England to America in 1939. Humphrey Carpenter's *W. H. Auden* is a massive biography that tells us everything we need to know, and possibly somewhat more, about the poet himself. Auden's own unfinished book, *The Prolific and the Devourer*, which he wrote during his first months in this country, gives us our clearest view so far of his transition from a socially to a religiously grounded attitude in both his life and his work.

This last, *The Prolific and the Devourer*, may be the most important of the three, at least to those of us whose primary concern is not scholarship, and Daniel Halpern is to be commended, I think, for giving it an entire issue of his magazine, *Antaeus*. The book remained unfinished precisely because it was written during a transition in Auden's life and thought, a transition that was proceeding faster than Auden could set it down. I have the feeling that sometimes his thoughts turned stale no more than two or three days after he had written them, so swift were his intellectual processes. Part of the pleasure of reading the book, as with so many other of the poet's works, is simply being witness to this extraordinary, almost frightening mental facility. But I do not mean to disparage the other two books; quite the contrary. Mendelson's is the kind of explicative forced march through the poems that we have become accustomed to, not to say bored with, as our heritage from the "New Criticism" of forty years past, but Mendelson does it better by far than any other critics I have read recently. He does not lack judgment, for instance, and he does risk saying which poems are better than others, while his writing is agreeable and not at all pedantic. In addition Mendelson was a friend of Auden and is one of his literary executors and the editor of the final posthumous collected editions of the poems. He has had access to materials not available to earlier critics. Myself, I am of two minds about this book as it impinges on my feelings about literature. Mendelson's analysis of *The Orators*, for instance, is extensive and brilliant, and in a way I enjoyed reading it; yet it does not convince me that the "Charade" (as Auden sub-

[1] EARLY AUDEN, by *Edward Mendelson*. Viking. $20.00. W. H. AUDEN: A Biography, by *Humphrey Carpenter*. Houghton Mifflin. $15.95. THE PROLIFIC AND THE DEVOURER, by *W. H. Auden*. *Antaeus*, No. 42 (Summer, 1981). $5.95.

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titled the work) is any more worthy of my attention now than it was before. Then does one read criticism for its own sake? Some do, but many don't, and I am of the latter. Nevertheless I believe Mendelson's book is required reading for everyone—and I can at least imagine a few outside the graves of academe—who wishes to become completely at home with all Auden's work.

As for the biography by Carpenter, I have said it is massive. Perhaps it only seems so because I am not much of a reader of biographies. But it does remind me of a former, ampler style in such books. It has abundant footnotes, for instance, most of them interesting, such as very few publishers will allow these days; and they are real footnotes at the bottom of the page, not stuck away in the back. Moreover, although Carpenter expressly disclaims the idea that his book is an "official" biography, he has compiled almost unbelievably huge masses of information from letters, from extensive interviews with Auden's surviving friends and relatives, and from the same collections of posthumous diaries, manuscripts, and other literary and personal remains that Mendelson uses. Indeed their two books somewhat overlap, although their different objectives, critical and biographical, are, as if by agreement, almost programmatically adhered to by both authors. What one receives from the biography, from the exhaustive compilation of details, is a truly intimate knowledge of Auden as man and author, and of the world of art, ideas, and homosexuality that he inhabited. One sees, for instance, what one had not recognized before, that this triad—art, ideas, homosexuality—is in ascending order of importance in Auden's life. Should one be disturbed to find that a poet's poems to him personally are less consequential than his life? On the contrary, in our post-neo-post-romanticism we should insist, as we do, that a good poet is a fully human being. And we should add that all good poets need to write poetry every day, as Auden did, i.e., to have the wonderful, wonderful luxury of time for concentrated work.

The biography has made me sad. Auden himself apparently believed he was happy, at least much of the time; called himself a happy man; seemed to think it his duty as a human being to be happy. Yet the biography is a succession of miseries. Broken romances, cruisers, prostitutes, failed ambitions, too much work and too much play. For years Auden popped a benzedrine every morning and a phenobarb every night. He consumed two to three packs of cigarettes a day beginning in high school and booze in quantities that nearly defy belief. Perhaps the saddest thing in the biography is a photographic portrait taken in his last year. Looking at it, I realized suddenly and for the first time the real meaning of the word *dissolute*. It means coming apart.

Does one need to know as much about a poet's private life as Carpenter gives us, all the episodes and connections that inevitably in anyone's life would appear as signals of weakness when recounted

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in such detail? I don't know. For myself, I think I should prefer a book somewhat less gossipy. Yet I cannot say that the accumulating insight derived from the gossip is not ultimately helpful in understanding Auden's work. At all events, I am sure no further general biography of Auden will be needed for a long time to come.

No other poet, not even Frost, has given me as much trouble in my own mind as Auden; none has simultaneously attracted and repelled me so forcibly. (I mean in his writing, of course. I never met him.) I think I have reviewed all his books of poetry since 1945 and a good many of his other books as well. Yet I doubt that any two of my reviews come close to saying the same thing. What attracted me first, nearly forty years ago, was Auden's astonishing verbal facility, which was something I was brought up to recognize. I don't know when or how I first learned the principles of verse-writing, it seems to me now that I never did not know them, and certainly I always thought of a poem not only as imaginative art but as prosodic artifact. Auden could write badly; but then he wrote so *much* and so much of it was *brilliant*. He could, for instance, take the tritest forms from all periods of English literature and, without display, turn them to new account, as in these lines about the moon:

She climbs the European sky;
Churches and power stations lie
  Alike among earth's fixtures:
Into the galleries she peers,
And blankly as an orphan stares
  Upon the marvellous pictures.

To gravity attentive, she
Can notice nothing here; though we
  Whom hunger cannot move,
From gardens where we feel secure
Look up, and with a sigh endure
  The tyrannies of love:

And, gentle, do not care to know,
Where Poland draws her Eastern bow,
  What violence is done;
Nor ask what doubtful act allows
Our freedom in this English house,
  Our picnics in the sun.

These are not Auden's best lines, and they are, here, only a small, discrete excerpt from the poem they belong to, "A Summer Night," quoted from its earliest published version—Auden later changed "orphan" to "butcher" in the fifth line. For that matter I am not sure what lines I like the best in all his work, or how good any of

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them ultimately are as poetry. But to take this jingly stanza from the satirical and light verse written a hundred years before, and to invest it with seriousness and fluency, is a genuine feat of *writing*; it is done through the synthesis of meter and rhythm, syntax and tone, and it is not done easily—I know because I have tried. No one cares any more about writing as such, it seems. But I still enjoy it.

In the long run, however, what attracted me more than his technique was his honesty. Auden did what we all told ourselves, when we were young, that we should do but that we seldom did, namely, to fight *against*, not for or with, one's talent. Auden is the only poet I know who consistently improved his old poems by revising them long after they were written. He did it again and again with each succeeding collection of his work. And always his revisions were in the direction of simplicity and clarity, suppressing whatever was in the least inflated or mushy or unearned. For honesty he threw away the products of his rhetorical genius without a qualm, and many of us complained about the loss of favorite passages and phrasings. Yet I believe his alterations were almost invariably improvements. The change from *orphan* to *butcher* in the lines I have quoted above is characteristic. *Orphan* was a favorite word of Auden's, which I believe he applied to himself, not without justice, in his letters and conversations until the end of his life. But in the poem he threw it out, relentlessly. His doing so still hurts my vestigial sense of beautiful language. But he was right.

Finally what attracted me throughout, and still attracts me, is Auden's intellectuality, which he often called, without the least complacency, his necessary way of being in the world. Sometimes it seems as if he was sensorily defective; one can find implications of this even in his sexuality, both in his poems and in Carpenter's biography; and certainly the imagery of his poems is seldom sensually evocative. His poems, like Donne's, function intellectually as they move in their sentences and figures, the short quote above being a good example. Yet is Auden less the poet for this? I insist, in spite of all the palaver during my lifetime about the necessity of the "concrete," the "objective" image, that he was not. "As you know," he once wrote in a letter, "my dominant faculties are intellect and intuition, my weak ones feeling and sensation. This means I have to approach life via the former; I must have knowledge and a great deal of it before I can feel anything." But isn't this true of all of us who take the trouble to be honest? Are the feelings raised in us by immediate perceptions of things as powerful and constructive as the feelings that come after study and thought? In his best work, which I think is limited to the shorter poems, Auden was a profoundly emotional writer, and I fail to see how any reader can miss that quality in his writing, that force, that humility, even when the knowledge is specialized—Auden was fond of scientific writing and by no means unschooled in it—and the thought is complex or

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quirky. For me, the poet who shows me his mind as well as his heart (Blake) is always more interesting than the one who shows me his heart alone (Smart).

What repels me in Auden is his cutesy-campy manner, which doubtless derives in part from his homosexuality, or rather from the ways of expressing his homosexuality that were forced on him by the society of his time and place, but which derives, I think, even more from the whole cultural conspectus of English middle-class, public-school life before World War II. Auden called *The Orators* a charade; that means a game; and gamesmanship became a more and more important analogue for art in his theoretical writings throughout his life, until in the book called *Secondary Worlds* (1969) he asserted outright that the world of the imagination is separate, totally disjunct, from the "primary world" of life, society, politics, and morality. It is true that a charade is not only a game, but a puzzle implying a solution, and I think this is what prevented Auden from drifting off completely and always into the secondary world of, for instance, Lewis Carroll and J. R. R. Tolkien, two of his favorite authors. Nevertheless the game-theory of life in a boarding school, life in a Christ Church quad, life in a homosexual café in Berlin was controlling in much of Auden's writing after the late 1930s, when he gave up a social view and resolutely turned to religion and privacy.

I could not disagree more with such a view of art and experience. To me it is not only dangerous and irresponsible, it is intellectually disgusting. For years I could never understand how a man of Auden's mind and sensibility, who had so marvelously mingled his social with his erotic and cultural concerns when he was doing the poems of the mid-1930s, could end by rejecting the responsibility of the artist to his real and human environment. Now I have read *The Prolific and the Devourer*, and I can see more clearly how his mind was working, though this does not take away an iota of my disagreement. The arguments are clearly stated in his book of *pensées*, however, which he began in imitation of Pascal, and some of them are abstruse, too complex to reproduce here. But they amount to nothing, while the commonest argument, both in this book and elsewhere, is the simple, not to say simple-minded, iteration of the "fact" that neither his own poems nor those of other "proletarian" poets in the 1930s had forestalled one death, one injustice, or one even infinitesimal wavelet in the advancing tide of fascism. Well, in the first place, how did he know, how could he tell? And in the second, did anyone ever expect poetry to produce a demonstrable and immediate political result? That is not the way it works. Quite aside from the immanent obligation of the member to the group, an obligation altogether compatible with the state of freedom, we know that a kind of cultural tensility or tone determines the quality of any civilization, and we know that it comes about through the

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combining, sometimes conflicting, efforts of artists, scientists, moralists, and politicians, i.e., the imaginative, cognitive, practical, and active components of human intelligence. Artists must do their part, no matter how difficult it is.

I am reminded of a time when I was in correspondence with Ezra Pound. I don't think I was influenced by Auden, I'm quite sure I was thinking only of the Cantos, but in one letter I asked Pound what was the point of putting social and political materials into poetry when the world was so obviously going to hell in a handbarrow anyway and the whole notion of social change was at odds with our experience of human feasibility. Pound fired back his answer: "Pheezabulity aint got nawthin to do with it. Besides, nobody said it was easy."

Auden had a glimpse of this, and some of his best early poetry came from that glimpse. Even in fond retrospect, it is good to know that he met and briefly worked with Bertolt Brecht; that moment of hope, or more strictly of possibility, existed. Mendelson has a sentence describing Brecht's position that I cannot improve on. "Instead of composing his unique experience into idiosyncratic structures, transmitting the forms of his vision to an audience of the aesthetically initiated, an artist must convey knowledge that is not exclusively his own, and that he and others can put to use." To rebel, in other words, against what we now call modernism. Brecht did it, he did it fifty years ago, and Auden almost did it. Then Auden, despondent and never able to reach a settled intellectual position, permitted himself to be co-opted again by modernism, and who can tell what might have been the course of Anglo-American writing, or what might be the condition of poetry today, i.e., instead of the ever more attenuated running-down of modernism we actually have, if that had not happened?

Auden at his best was a first-rate, hard-working writer. He did his best work alone. His collaborations with homosexual friends and lovers, Isherwood, Britten, Kallman, and others, were too tricky and dilettantish; the best of them is probably the libretto for Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*. Beyond this, his best collaborations were in translations of poetry where he used the literal cribs furnished by someone else. Such a work was his translation of poems by Pär Lagerkvist done with Leif Sjöberg, *Evening Land*, published in 1976 after Auden's death, poems so lovely and showing so effectively a *writer's* sanative genius that I wonder why no one but I has ever noticed them; the title is not even included in the bibliography at the end of Carpenter's book.

Beyond this I will risk saying, after all, that I think Auden's two finest works were written just before and not long after his coming to the United States. The first is the sequence of sonnets done as a consequence of the journey he and Isherwood made to China in 1938 at the height of the war with Japan. Originally it was called

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"In Time of War," but I prefer the retitled and considerably rewritten version in the *Collected Poems* (1976) called simply "Sonnets from China." The second is "Horae Canonicae," a sequence of poems based on the Offices of the Church and the events of Good Friday, published in its complete form in *The Shield of Achilles* (1955) but begun some years earlier. Significantly, Auden did not rewrite "Horae Canonicae," once it was published, and in the last edition of his poems which he himself supervised, *The Collected Shorter Poems* (1967), he placed "Horae Canonicae" out of chronological order at the end of the volume. Then, of course, there are some dozens of separate short poems that are superb, though more from the 1930s and 1940s than from his later decades, and brilliant passages in some of the long poems like *New Year Letter* and *The Age of Anxiety*, even if, taken in their wholenesses, not a single one of his long poems is satisfactory.

Often I get down my copy of *The Collected Shorter Poems*, flipping the pages at random as one does, being disappointed and elated by turn. I think I always will.

Some day, I suppose, a biographer with a narrower but tougher and more profound end in view than Carpenter's will try to discover why a writer as gifted as clearly Auden was could produce, out of the enormous mass of his work, so little that endures. Such a biographer will need prodigious finesse, as critic, historian, sociologist, psychologist, and even metaphysician. Could it be done? I think probably not. Sartre failed miserably—and grandiosely and selfishly—when he tried to do it for Jean Genêt. But wouldn't it be a wonderful book if it could be done? It would tell us more about art and life than any number of biographies and critical studies devoted to the other great literary figures of the half century from 1910 to 1960, those who fared better than Auden in this matter of the proportion of satisfactory to unsatisfactory work.

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RICHARD PEVEAR

On the Prose of Wendell Berry

Thou, Nature, art my goddess . . .
(Edmund, *King Lear* I, ii)

But, for true need—
(Lear, *King Lear* II, iv)

IN THEIR DIFFERENCES, Wendell Berry's *Recollected Essays* and *The Gift of Good Land*[1] balance each other nicely. The first, a selection of descriptive and reflective essays drawn from five previously published books, presents the major themes of his thought as it has developed over the years (1965–1980). It is essentially a personal book, an *apologia pro vita sua*, though the reflective pieces go far beyond the personal. The second is a collection of articles written since the publication of *The Unsettling of America* in 1977. These are more directly concerned with farming, and take us outside of Mr. Berry's native Kentucky to Pennsylvania, the Midwest, the Southwest, and as far as Peru, studying a variety of techniques, tools, and crops, their propriety or impropriety in relation to the land and the people who live on it. But the book is subtitled "Further Essays Cultural and Agricultural," and in fact the two always go together in Mr. Berry's writing. Thus the first collection ends with an account of the "Making of a Marginal Farm" (his own), and the second ends with an essay on Judaeo-Christian tradition and the question of "right livelihood."

The value of Mr. Berry's work, and the basis of his polemic with the dominant mentality and methodology of "technological civilization," lies in his insistence on making these connections, or rather, on revealing the connections between culture and agriculture, in his detailing of a wide and subtle network of relations between human activity and the surrounding natural world, a network that leads finally to "mystery" because it vastly exceeds our knowledge and control. Within that network man has a place, determined as much by

[1] RECOLLECTED ESSAYS, 1965–1980, by *Wendell Berry*. North Point Press. $15.00; $7.50. THE GIFT OF GOOD LAND: Further Essays Cultural and Agricultural, by *Wendell Berry*. North Point Press. $16.50; $8.50.

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his ignorance as by his knowledge, and past cultures have over long periods of time worked out delicate systems of self-control, moral and religious "disciplines" as well as agricultural ones, to keep themselves in that place, in a fruitful balance with the life of the earth. The people of the Peruvian highlands, for example, have maintained the fertility of their small, terraced fields for several thousand years, and have done so, as Mr. Berry describes in "An Agricultural Journey to Peru," not only because they learned how to prevent erosion and to rotate crops but because they lived within certain cultural disciplines. The loss of these connections, on the other hand, or the willful breaking of them, brings serious consequences, some of which might be foreseeable but others of which will appear unexpectedly, perhaps disastrously, in time. A disruption of the network at one point will disrupt it at all points; the relations exist and are not of our making; the humility of enquiring into them is proper to man. Thus ecological thinking acquires an almost religious tone, markedly so in Mr. Berry's writing. He points out that with present day methods of industrializd agriculture ("agribusiness") six bushels of Iowa topsoil are lost for each bushel of corn harvested, at which rate there will be no topsoil left in Iowa by the year 2050. The cultural causes and cultural effects of such an agricultural and natural disaster should be obvious. The "spirit" in which this kind of farming is done would be difficult to defend on any grounds, yet it is the ruling spirit of our economy. To change it also means a change of "spirit."

This brings me to a second point of agreement with Mr. Berry. He is quite unabashedly an opponent of industrialization, technological "problem solving," and the "economy of scale." It is a hard position to maintain in the face of facts. One is inevitably accused of various lapses—romantic utopianism, nostalgia for the past, reactionary agrarianism—all of which come down to a refusal to face facts. But Mr. Berry has arrived at his position precisely by facing facts. He says, in "Discipline and Hope":

> Though I can see no way to defend the economy, I recognize the need to be concerned for the suffering that would be produced by its failure. But I ask if it is necessary for it to fail in order to change; I am assuming that if it does not change it must sooner or later fail, and that a great deal that is more valuable will fail with it.

The social and spiritual consequences of industrialization (the term is hardly adequate to describe the change that occurred in our culture some two or three centuries ago) were seen and opposed from the start. We know Goldsmith's "Deserted Village" and Blake's "dark Satanic mills." But, as with other "revolutions," the powers were already in place and the process continued; it has become our history and shaped our world. And opposition to it has been re-

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moved to a "theoretical" realm. It has been seen almost as a question of "taste." However, the industrialization of agriculture, which has taken place relatively slowly and been effected only recently, has brought these theoretical questions literally down to earth. This is the force of Mr. Berry's "agricultural model," of his use of the complex relations of farming as a measure of cultural and social relations, an analogy that reveals the network of interconnections that has sustained human life. Industrialization of agriculture means the destruction of agriculture. It is a last step that brings the entire process of industrialization full circle and reveals it in a new and hard light. Which happens to be the light in which Blake, for one, saw it.

The most concise statement of Mr. Berry's analysis appears in his essay "Agricultural Solutions for Agricultural Problems," from *The Gift of Good Land*. Much of what he says there, and elsewhere, about the plight of the farmer in "agribusiness" has been said before about industrial workers. In general, there is "nothing new" in his critique of specialization, fragmentation, social division, consumerism, the abstractness of "the economy," and so on. But these problems appear most acutely in relation to farming, which is the most elementary human activity and rests on the most fundamental relations to the earth, relations which are not a matter of choice, taste, "life style," or of ideological persuasion. That, having come down to that realization, we may also work back up from it, is Mr. Berry's hope.

But the size and long-time establishment of the "systems in place," their persuasiveness and self-justification, and thus the scope of the changes necessary, can easily lead one to despair. Mr. Berry says, in "The Making of a Marginal Farm":

> A destructive history, once it is understood as such, is a nearly insupportable burden. Understanding it is a disease of understanding, depleting the sense of efficacy and paralyzing effort. . . .

Then he adds: ". . . unless it finds healing work." For him, the making of his own farm has been that healing work. Earlier he had written:

> The change I am talking about appeals to me precisely because it need not wait upon "other people." Anybody who wants to do so can begin it in himself and in his household as soon as he is ready. . . .

Which might be taken as an example of American do-it-yourselfism, but actually states a much more important principle. I would stress that importance by setting it beside a passage from Simone Weil's *Oppression and Liberty*:

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> The enlightened goodwill of men acting in an individual capacity is the only possible principle of social progress; if social necessities, once clearly perceived, were found to lie outside the range of this goodwill in the same way as those which govern the stars, each man would have nothing more to do but watch history unfolding as one watches the seasons go by, while doing his best to spare himself and his loved ones the misfortune of being either an instrument or a victim of social oppression.

One can act on one's own, and one can encourage others to act, for instance by writing books. But here we come to another problem, that of clear perception, and to "discipline" of another sort.

Simone Weil's thought, or the emphasis of her thought, moved in its development from social analysis to questions of religious inspiration. Mr. Berry, as the sequence of his *Recollected Essays* makes clear, has always been a "religious" thinker, though the emphasis in his work has shifted more and more to practical problems and solutions. The change he calls for is not only one of method or economy, it is a change of mind and heart, a change of "values," and he recognizes that such a change can come about only by "inspiration," not by imposition. He sees it as a *re-ligio* in the most literal sense, a "binding back" to relations that once existed and have been broken, to the "sacred ties" of man and earth, man and woman, household and community. Precisely because we have so much power to do harm, we must choose "the good." But to do so we must know what "the good" is, or at least where to turn our attention in search of it. The point at which religious vision defines itself against ideology is in the question of true inspiration. Inspiration *comes to* us; it is not an idea or "value" that we create. But where does it come *from*?

In search of a source of value and of a humbling power that might correct the arrogance of our civilization, a source of persuasive authority beyond human limits, Mr. Berry arrives at the order of nature—that great, integral system which does not depend on us but upon which we depend for our existence, and to which we must submit if we wish that existence to continue. From the order of nature he derives the various relations and disciplines of human culture, which take their propriety from their practicality, that is, from necessity. He arrives, in other words, at a Stoic deification of Nature. Which is not without dignity. But, though there appears to be a compelling unity in his vision, I believe that it is, in truth, deeply inconsistent, contradictory, and argued with a certain amount of intellectual "bad faith." That it closes the openings through which a true inspiration might come, and that it finally does not serve his own cause very well.

I do not have room to trace in detail the development of this religious view of nature in Mr. Berry's work. It starts in his earliest descriptive essays as a feeling of awe before "the Creation" (as he

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always refers to it), for its power ("it is not subject") as well as its beauty. From there it widens into the inclusive ethical-ecological system presented in his later books, *A Continuous Harmony* and *The Unsettling of America*. Various aspects of this vision appear in different places in his work, but they can be brought together under one particular statement from the end of "Discipline and Hope":

> What I have been preparing at such length to say is that there is only one value: the life and health of the world.

That is the most fundamental axiom of his thought. Certain conclusions follow from it, which I will list here: (1) The Creation creates itself and is complete in itself (denial of God, of "spirit," of transcendence, of incarnation). (2) Man is the zoological species "man" (denial of the "person" in the Christian sense). (3) History, cultural tradition, community have no meaning except as they affect the life and health of the world and, subordinate to that, the survival of the human species (in the West these effects have been increasingly harmful, whence a marked contempt for "humanity"). (4) Time is cyclical in motion, "cosmic" time. (5) Means are the only real ends (there are no ends). (6) Death is part of the process and should be accepted. (7) The necessary is "the good."

Each of these points could be illustrated by a number of quotations from Mr. Berry's writings. Together they make up a consistent view of life, though he never brings them together in one place. It is a view that dispenses with the entire Judaeo-Christian tradition, not only its "teachings" but its deepest motives. It also dispenses with a good deal of Greek tradition. Mr. Berry may mean to dispense with these things. But he does not always keep his own conclusions in mind, and often ignores their implications. For instance, he frequently speaks of "mystery" and "transcendence," of sacraments and rituals, of community and spirituality, though none of these words can have any meaning for him. And his language tends constantly towards paraphrases and quotations from the Bible, particularly the Gospels, though he denies the very basis of their vision. I will give one example, admittedly an extreme one, of this sort of "bad faith":

> In one of the medicine rites of the Winnebago, according to Paul Radin, an old woman says: "Our father has ordained that my body shall fall to pieces. I am the earth. Our father ordained that there should be death, lest otherwise there be too many people and not enough food for them." Because death is inescapable, a biological and ecological necessity, its acceptance becomes a spiritual obligation, the only means of making life whole: "Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it."

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The several kinds of falseness and carelessness in this one brief passage are unfortunately typical of Mr. Berry's religious thinking (as opposed to the knowledgeable care with which he writes about farming). The words "life" and "whole" have a good sound, especially together, though what he means here by "making life whole" I cannot say (nor does he say). Whose "life" and what makes up that "whole"? To whom is this "spiritual obligation" owed? And why does it matter that we "accept" the "inescapable"? To presume, as the context suggests, that we owe an obligation to the Earthmaker of Winnebago myth is to presume that we believe that myth—a question Mr. Berry does not raise. His thought is ill-defined to begin with. But to illustrate it with the words of Christ, who represents the very opposite of Mr. Berry's thinking, who overcame death and the "powers of the world," and who is speaking here with an utterly different meaning, is either thoughtless or dishonest. (Christ's words appear seven times in the Gospels; only once does he *not* say, "Whosoever shall lose his life *for my sake* . . . ," and that is the saying Mr. Berry quotes.) He has a case to make, which he argues from his own emotions, selecting words that sound "good" or seem to support him regardless of their own context. That is, he makes a "religion" of his cause—a reversal not uncommon in this age of ideologies.

Hatred of our civilization has as its worst fruit ignorance of its meaning and spirit. That meaning and spirit have been oppressed for some time; they are as eroded as Iowa's topsoil—a connection Mr. Berry does not make. On the contrary, the marks of that erosion show rather clearly in his work. As examples I would cite his defense of a cyclical as opposed to a linear view of time; his definition of "freedom" ("Men are free precisely to the extent that they are equal to their own needs"); his criticism, repeated in several places, of the "separation of body and soul" in Christianity—all of which he undertakes rather lightheartedly, as if these were not the central issues of our culture, as if his only opponents were a few mindless capitalists. Consider the discussion of "means as ends" in "Discipline and Hope." This is a crucial point. Mr. Berry says:

> . . . the discipline of ends is no discipline at all. The end is preserved in the means; a desirable end may perish forever in the wrong means. Hope lives in the means, not the end. Art does not survive in its revelations, or agriculture in its products, or craftsmanship in its artifacts, or civilization in its monuments, or faith in its relics.

The first three assertions are quite true. But what follows is the kind of ill-sorted overstatement Mr. Berry is often forced into by the narrowness of his basic assumptions. Farming requires the sustained, repeated use of good means. But farming is itself a means.

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Artifacts are also means, and well-made ones are better than poorly made ones because they work better. Only the worst sort of amateur craftsman enshrines his artifacts and worships them. Perhaps, too, only the amateur farmer worships farming. To what end is farming done? To what end does a craftsman work? And what ends do the artist, the architect, the priest serve? The answers will be very different, and that difference cannot be accounted for in Mr. Berry's system. In fact, it precludes the questions. "There is oppression whenever means are made into ends," Simone Weil wrote. We see an example of that in our "industrial economy." But also, strangely enough, in the "religious" vision that Mr. Berry opposes to it. While he denounces man's oppression of nature, he accepts as necessary, and therefore good, nature's oppression of man. Which leads to the deepest contradiction in his thought.

Nature idolatry is finally a worship of power. It was for her grandeur and power that the Stoics worshipped nature. It is this power that Mr. Berry worships, the "Native Hill" that eats its owners, the power that will turn him into humus—an event he anticipates with peculiar enthusiasm. It is this power and grandeur that he wants to protect from the petty attacks of humanity. That is what he means when he says that "the life and health of the world" is the only value. In terms of geological time, he need not worry; the wilderness will win. But does nature care what sort of wilderness she is? A barren desert is also a wilderness. If mankind should succeed in turning the world into a barren desert, nature will not object, any more than she objects to the planet Mercury or the planet Pluto or the empty surface of the moon. She will not notice the disappearance of mankind, whose "history in the world, their brief clearing of the ground," as Mr. Berry says rather coolly, "will seem no more than the opening and shutting of an eye." By harming nature, we only harm ourselves. We cannot live in a barren desert. The entire ecological system of the earth is the "value" only for human life. But what is human life worth, if it is only to be plowed back into the topsoil? Job, whose humility Mr. Berry praises, would not accept that "spiritual obligation":

> If I look for Sheol as my house, if I spread my couch in the darkness, if I say to the pit, You are my father, and to the worm, My mother, or My sister, where then is my hope? Who will see my hope? Will it go down to the bars of Sheol? Shall we descend together into the dust?

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JEFFERSON HUNTER

Angry Englishmen

SAMUEL BUTLER'S REBELLION WAS DIRECTED almost impartially against the Father of the Victorian family and the Father of the Old Testament. The nay-saying, joy-killing figures combined in Canon Thomas Butler, who urged the Church and then the Law upon his wayward, doubting son. But the son wanted only to paint. Checked in that ambition, he had to settle for four years' sheep-farming in New Zealand, where he noted the mountain scenery later introduced into *Erewhon* and, more to the point, made money. It was as a man of independent means that Butler came home; it was as an intellectually independent man of letters that he fought the old parental strictures with his wit, his knowledge of the classics (and his affection for the Greek world), his restless curiosity, and his refusal to be earnest in any way Thomas Butler would recognize. He translated Homer, theorized about Shakespeare's sonnets, disputed Darwin, kept a famous notebook. Above all, he wrote *The Way of All Flesh*, that monument to the guilty pleasures of disobeying the Fifth Commandment.

One might style this a small-scale or understated rebellion: Butler was not the man to fret about large secular issues (economics, international relations, practical politics) or to hope for more than individual liberations. Nor would any reader of Butler wish it otherwise. His limited anger produced an effectively limited prose style—an ironic, probing, gentlemanly style suitable for exposés if not manifestos. The danger is that, savoring the understated style, one may take Butler too simply. He may be undervalued as a merely amiable intellectual hedonist. Thomas L. Jeffers' *Samuel Butler Revalued*[1] shows just how serious an undervaluation that would be, demonstrating, among other things, that Butler's hedonism was a fully thought-out, responsible philosophical tenet, his ethics a magnanimous wish that the pleasures of life be shared as widely as possible. This learned and eloquently written study is magnanimous itself in wanting to do justice to a thinker who had faults—pusillanimity, chiefly—but also generous virtues. Jeffers seems at first to put Butler in highfalutin' company, but finally all the arguments for Butler's affinity with Hobbes (or Locke, or Lord Chesterfield, or William Cobbett) are made convincing. Butler escaped from his father's piety so that he could find his true patrimony in the eighteenth century—not the eighteenth century of smug teleologies, a watch-mak-

[1] SAMUEL BUTLER REVALUED, by *Thomas L. Jeffers*. Pennsylvania State University Press. $12.00.

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ing deity, and mechanistic metaphors for the cosmos (as Jeffers makes clear), but the eighteenth century of Hume and humane skepticism. *Samuel Butler Revalued* moves commandingly over the full range of Butler's ideas and antecedent texts; if not the first book one should read on its subject (it assumes a knowledge of Butler not everyone will have), it is the best book to read if one wants to see in Butler more than a pleasant ironist who in his "utopia" made illness a crime, who argued that Nausicaa composed the *Odyssey*.

About sixty years after Butler departed for New Zealand, another young Englishman, Eric Arthur Blair, departed for Burma. This was an act of filial piety rather than rebellion: Blair's father had been in the Opium Department of the Indian Imperial Service. Blair himself was to join the Imperial Police. He was to train native constables, investigate crimes and issue judgments, keep order—do all the dirty work of Empire; become one of Kipling's "Sons of Martha." The work got done. Blair perhaps assisted at a hanging, certainly shot an elephant which had gone on musth and killed a villager. But the work filled Blair with loathing, both for the Burmese who resented his uniform and the political system which kept him in that uniform. After a struggle he reacted against the Empire and his family's tradition of service to it by resigning his appointment, coming home, and turning himself into a tramp, an investigator of the dirty places of that home island which was so bent on sending out young men to make Africa and Asia clean and straight. Blair was conscious of a guilt he had to expiate, and he expiated it, finally, by understanding all its sources (class, education, nationality) and by writing about it. He published a semi-autobiographical account of his life among the down-and-outs in Paris and London, then a novel set in Burma. By this point Blair had become George Orwell.

Orwell's rebellion is more comprehensive, more political, and finally more admirable than Butler's, because it is based on a larger grasp of contemporary issues (economic, as well as cultural; international, as well as English), and because it cost Orwell so much to make. He was a man who had to suffer himself in order to see how the Means Test, say, made others suffer. He went to Spain not to write—not even to write the "flat ephemeral pamphlet" the temporarily *engagé* Auden advocated in "Spain, 1937"—but to fight the Royalists; that is, to act directly on behalf of the social revolution Republican Spain had begun. (Once there, he fought on behalf of the classless society the anarchists achieved, for a moment, in Barcelona.) Perhaps the right word for Orwell's rebellion is "exemplary." It is his virtue as a writer to make one think one might be capable of honesty and moral vision. Certainly the targets of his anger are still in place, awaiting a new Orwell's castigation: Stalin has had successors, slum-dwellers are still condescendingly put in place, doublethink pours from the world's presses.

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Orwell's novels and books of reportage have by now been thoroughly academicized—compared with Proust, compared with Koestler; shown to be despairing, shown to be hopeful—and the man himself revealed in various memoirs by friends. Peter Stansky and William Abrahams' recent two-volume biography uncovers some previously unknown facts but too often relies on symbolic readings of certain allegedly crucial turning points in Orwell's career: the adoption of his pseudonym, for instance. Bernard Crick's *George Orwell*,[2] however, is the first "complete" biography. That is, it is the first to benefit from unrestricted access to the papers in the Orwell Archive at University College, London, and the first to be sanctioned by Orwell's widow and literary executor. The word "complete" is for once justified. This is a meticulous work of scholarship, a demonstration of what may be learned when a writer checks his facts (something Orwell the journalist did not always succeed in doing). In one or two places, perhaps, the facts are checked and recorded with excessive zeal. Do we need to be told three times that Orwell called Swift a Tory anarchist? And do we need all those reports on Orwell's football games at Eton? (He was not very good.)

Crick declares that he will not attempt an analysis of Orwell's character, character being to him either unknowable or a pure fiction. Nevertheless Orwell's personal qualities emerge clearly here: his patriotism, his need to love and be loved by women, his courage, his liking for disputation, his diligence (a surprisingly crude writer at the start, Orwell had to labor to produce his much-praised clarity and directness), his deep English reticence (in *Homage to Catalonia* he half apologizes about describing his personal feelings when he is shot). It is pleasant to learn from this biography that Orwell was taught French at Eton by Aldous Huxley; that he used Richard Rees's elegant home in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, as a "drop," a place to change clothes for slumming expeditions; and that his wife's experiences in the Ministry of Food during the Second World War supplied some ideas about propagandizing for *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. From such details one can reconstruct an appealingly odd and varied life.

A life, then, *George Orwell* provides, a life with its beginning, middle, and end. The account of Orwell's final illness is in fact a deeply moving narrative. But a life and what? Not a Life and Works or Life and Times, Crick says, because he is neither a literary critic nor a social historian. He is a political theorist, and what he has written is a Life and Politics, which is as it should be. Consider Orwell's statement in "Why I Write" (1946): "Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic Socialism, as I understand it. It seems to me nonsense, in a period like our own, to think that

[2] GEORGE ORWELL, by *Bernard Crick*. Little, Brown. $17.95.

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one can avoid writing of such subjects." This is an obvious mandate for investigating Orwell's political ideas thoroughly, tracing their sources and following their development through all of the events which made him political. Crick is very clear about Burma and its lesson, the importance of Orwell's trip to the industrial North of England to gather material for *The Road to Wigan Pier*, the Communist-Anarchist hostilities in Spain; he is convincing about Orwell's *slowly* evolving belief in democratic Socialism. The slow evolution produced a tenacious faith. Orwell held to it when it was decisively defeated in Spain and when—this was a yet more disillusioning and bewildering experience—he was hailed in America as the anti-Communist and therefore pro-capitalist author of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The only drawback (a minor one) of Crick's political emphasis is that it makes him neglect a less public side of the man, his bookishness. Orwell was, after all, soaked in books good, bad, and indifferent (to these categories he would have added his own: the "good bad" books he wrote about so perceptively). He was an assiduous professional reviewer and a novelist without a great deal of imagination, who had therefore to rely on other books for plot ideas. An Orwell work like *Coming Up for Air* stems from frustration at English complacency and a longing for purgative violence, yes, but also from H. G. Wells's *The History of Mr Polly* and Leonard Merrick's *Conrad in Quest of his Youth*. But then the bookishness is there to discover for anyone who follows Orwell's reading; his politics need an analyst as conscientious and knowledgeable as Crick.

"Thou shouldst be living at this hour" is the burden of much recent commentary on Orwell. It is an understandable plaint. Who, after Orwell, has been a commanding moral presence in English intellectual life? Whose rebellion can be taken as instructive, let alone exemplary? *In Anger*,[3] a survey of English cultural life from the end of the war to 1960 by Robert Hewison, supplies an array of candidates, from the mild iconoclasts of the early days of the BBC's Third Programme to the Angry Young Men of 1956, but finally fails to make a choice. Not John Wain, not Kingsley Amis, not John Osborne, not Colin Wilson seems finally to be at the center of intellectual activity. The center is not to be found, really: English cultural history in this period is a hodgepodge of haphazard reactions, dispersed energies, and complicated issues. The Suez Crisis provoked discussion but—unlike Spain in the thirties—offered no gathering place for ideas.

None of this is the fault of *In Anger*, of course, which is simply reporting on a confused period. Poetry, fiction, drama, films, painting, and television all pass under Hewison's gaze and are intelligently categorized; the influence of economic events is discussed; the

[3] IN ANGER: British Culture in the Cold War 1945–60, by *Robert Hewison*. Oxford University Press. $19.95.

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chief personalities are put into a context. This is an excellent book to go to for information, should you want to know the specific pubs BBC producers made into a "miniature Bohemia," or the specific memoirs having most to say about cultural life. It is strongest in making quick connections between one arts phenomenon and another (the influence—largely stimulated by A. Alvarez—of American poetry on British poetry, as paralleled by the influence of American Abstract Expressionism on British painting), weakest in analyzing individual artists. To say, *tout court*, that Graham Greene's "fascination with the flawed personality . . . reflects a period when nations were behaving with the same moral confusion" is to say less than is needed about either Greene or the relations of culture and society. Some of Hewison's "discussions" of artistic groups are really lists of names, dates, and titles. Still, lists, records, and brief resumés are all highly useful—as useful as accurate committee minutes—and when joined with Hewison's commentary make *In Anger* a valuable guide to a period which resembles nothing so much as a committee meeting: an endlessly prolonged, relentlessly articulate committee meeting. The members manfully tackle the question of what Britain's postwar culture is to be, issue motions and counter-motions ("the Movement" is answered by the new Romanticism, the New Left rounds on the Old). One faction (Osborne, Wilson, Lessing) gets up and makes an angry speech. But in the end, in the absence of a powerful chairman, they reach no consensus and adjourn . . . in anger, possibly; certainly in weary longing for those decades when the moral choices seemed simpler.

Notes on Contributors ***(continued from page 265)***

DORE J. LEVY teaches in the Comparative Literature Department at Brown University, and is completing her doctoral dissertation—a study of Chinese narrative poetry.

An essay on Rilke by EMILY GROSHOLZ will appear in an early issue of this Review.

Working Papers, a collection of essays and reviews by HAYDEN CARRUTH, has recently been published by University of Georgia Press.

RICHARD PEVEAR has a new book of poems, *Exchanges*, from Spuyten Duyvil Press.

JEFFERSON HUNTER teaches English at Smith. Harvard University Press has just published his book, *Edwardian Fiction*.

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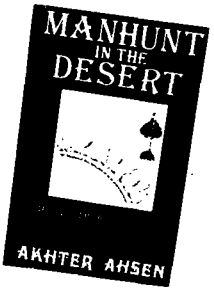

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